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IN THE CHEERING-UP  
BUSINESS

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BY

MARY CATHERINE LEE  
AUTHOR OF "A QUAKER GIRL OF NANTUCKET"



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# IN THE CHEERING-UP BUSINESS.



## CHAPTER I.

### A DIFFICULT QUESTION.

“HAS you made out what to do with yerself, Miss Rebecca?”

I can see Columbia now, as she looked when she used to ask me that question, day after day, standing with her dark head sharply silhouetted against the whitewashed wall, her hair braided into those short tails which made all the little dogs in the neighborhood look at her out of the corners of their eyes with much suspicion and dread.

She was apt to stand with her soaked hands poised in a way that gave her a helpless, pathetic expression, and the foam of the washingsuds, which had been a delight in my childhood, and with which I had repeatedly scrubbed the black arms, longing to make them white, as it slowly dwindled on the same fast-colored skin, seemed to hint at the evanescence and hopelessness of things in general.

Columbia's eyes, that were like two large huckleberries swimming in small saucers of milk, would spill some phenomenal drops of water, as she put the question. The wonder of this was based upon an inveterate expectation of my infancy, with which I had not parted, that Columbia's tears would be an opaque, creamy white, as the drippings of a saucer of milk should be.

She had been given to tears — poor Columbia! — ever since the time when we, who had been accustomed to believe that the universe was our own, had been disabused of that notion, and made partly to understand that even the poor plain provender which we despised and rejected, and at length hungrily devoured, was not at all our own.

In those days, something very unjust took place, — we never understood what, — and our pale, sensitive father, who was like a reed shaken in the wind, when the smallest thing went wrong, was broken to the earth, never to rise again. Our invincible stepmother was a widow then, with a widow's right to her thirds; but it turned out that the only property my father left to be divided was Dick and Cam and Milly and me.

Contrary to the usual feeling among heirs, my stepmother was magnanimously allowed to keep the whole estate, against which she gen-

erously protested. She was not without comfortable means of her own, but these she had carefully managed, not at all with a view to bestowing the results upon Dick and Cam and Milly and me. Her first economy was to dismiss our old Columbia; and after that, we wouldn't have been surprised if she had dismissed all the rest of us, for Columbia seemed to belong in our home as much as we did.

One evening, when the younger ones were in bed, I was musing over the last sparks of the sitting-room fire, in which I saw another dreary analogy, for I was given to forming analogies, and formed them chiefly upon the dolorous plan, in those days. My stepmother had a visitor in the next room. I was not thinking of her, or her visitor, or noticing what was said, until a few distinct words pierced into my consciousness, and brought me to perceive, very clearly, that she did, indeed, purpose to dismiss us.

“Who is to take the burden and responsibility of all these children?” she said. “You can easily see, Mr. Preston, that I shall not be able to, with my small means.”

I rose, and stood quite still for a moment. There were reasons why this woman should have been a tender friend to her husband's children. I knew some of them, and my bony, spindling body felt like a rod of steel as I turned then,

and opening the door of the parlor wide, answered the question myself.

“*I am to do it!*” I said.

My stepmother appeared to consider whether this was to be accepted as a *bona fide* proposition, the prospect of a happy issue out of all her afflictions; but Mr. Preston, our guardian, and my father’s old friend, rose, and taking my little claw in his great plump soft hand, said, —

“You come and stay with my wife and me for a while, my dear, all of you, and we’ll think this matter over at our leisure.”

The next day we went to Mr. Preston’s. But Mr. Preston was only a minister, in a small town, — a Unitarian minister, — and although Unitarian religion seems to pay very well, even in these places where the Pilgrim Fathers settled those matters differently, and settled them once for all, as they supposed, still, Mr. and Mrs. Preston had a large family of their own; so really, the question as to what was to be done with Dick and Cam and Milly and me was one which needed to be settled as promptly as possible.

Dick and Cam were presently sent to a good school where the poor boys work to pay their expenses, and little Milly was taken by a lady in Worcester. How closely I held her in my arms all the night before she was carried away! and in



the morning her pretty yellow curls were quite wet with my tears.

Then there was only myself, the oldest, left, and as I was seventeen, and was supposed to have had very good advantages, it would be a pity, I thought, if I could n't take care of myself; and, moreover, I resolved, like Daniel Eysette, "*de reconstruire le foyer.*"

Columbia had taken a little hut of a dwelling for herself, and took in washings. Though I was busy helping Mrs. Preston as much as possible, and projecting plans for the reconstruction of the fireside, I went nearly every day to talk over my prospects with her.

"We'll trust in Providence, Miss Rebecca, dear," she would say. "Humph! I'll trust in Providence if it fetches me up down to Squip-nocket!"

There was a good deal of trust, and a good deal of zeal to count upon, but it was n't so easy as I had supposed to set the domestic fire going again, or even to dispose of the varied abilities of one girl to any pecuniary advantage, though I had fancied myself deciding with difficulty which to accept among the multitudinous opportunities to use my accomplishments in some remunerative way.

But the days went on, and I still sat at Mrs. Preston's table, and slept in her one guest-cham-

ber, without the least clamoring for my assistance coming from any quarter whatever, though it had been confidently offered, it seemed to me, from shore to shore of the continent, in almost every capacity of which a young lady could be conceived to make a resource ; as a companion ; as a teacher of a little music, a little drawing, a good deal of Kensington embroidery, and at length simple reading and spelling ; as one who would do various kinds of writing and sewing ; who would read aloud to invalids and blind people. Any genteel or respectable mode of attendance upon humanity at large, which would put into market almost any power of a girl's mind or body, was, in effect, hopefully considered, until it seemed as if the Chinese question, the Irish question, the great Future State question itself, fell into insignificance beside the stupendous inquiry, —

*What is to be done with this young woman?*

I sat up nights to devise an answer to it, unaware that the world was studying a similar problem, and even began to write feverish treatises, calling the attention of mankind to the fact that the avenues were all closed to a girl who wanted to earn her living and reconstruct the fireside, while a boy could sell newspapers and black boots. If all my dumb, struggling passion could have poured itself out, the

woman's branch of the sociological question might have found a voice which would have been heard above that of Mr. Henry George.

At length, one day, when I paid my visit to Columbia, I carried something in my pocket which represented my first opportunity; yet it was such an unwelcome one that I had secretly chosen another alternative, and meant to lay that before Columbia first.

She began with the usual formula, —

“I s'pose you has n't found out anything, Miss Rebecca?”

She was out in her dooryard, pinning her brilliant white linen to the lines. The soft air in which it shivered united all the delicious properties that ever distilled in the chasm of a June sky. The most delightful of all odors exhaled from the drying linen.

Columbia's dooryard was the whole stretch of country between her little house and the sea. The sea itself was in plain sight, sparkling under resplendent sunshine. It looked as if the doors were all open to everywhere, — to everything. “Ah, I *could* be happy!” I said to myself, and my whole heart reached out with ardent longing towards the unrequiting world, but my answer to Columbia was, —

“I've made up my mind to come and live with you, and help do the washings, Columbia.”

She tossed her head as if I had offered her an affront.

“Go 'long, Miss Rebecca! How you talk! I sh'd be ashamed!”

These ejaculations were flung at me like harmless missiles.

“Why, how you talk yourself, Columbia!” I returned. “It's a wonder we have n't thought of it before. I should like pinning the clothes on the lines. How sweet they smell! How sweet and nice everything always is here!”

“I'll warrant 't is,” said Columbia with satisfaction. “I lived eighteen years with your ma. You has n't forgot that, I hope. If that don't guarantee my ways and smells to be sweet and nice, I should like to know what would. Jes' you leave them wet duds alone there, Miss Rebecca, dear; here, gi' me the clo'spins! You'll get that clean frock all in a muckle, that I was a good hour a-iron'n', and you look as nice in it as would have made your own mother delighted to see you!”

“And I should n't be so homesick here,” I went on, clinging to the new idea, while I obediently resigned the clothes-pins and wet duds. “O Columbia, I'm so lonesome,—so homesick! I was always bad about that, you know. You never heard my epitaph, did you?”

“Yer *epitaph*, chile?”



“The one I wrote when I first went to Miss Goddard’s school. I was so homesick I thought I should die ; and then I thought that even if I did die, I should be homesick all the same, laid away off in a grave by myself, in the Evergreen Cemetery, a mile and a half from home, and I wrote my epitaph in case it should happen. This is the way it went : —

“ Here lies Rebecca G. Parmalee.  
 Many a one was wiser,  
 And a few were more foolish than she ;  
 No wisdom into the grave descends,  
 But one folly still clings to her dust :  
 Pining ever for home and her friends,  
 Though her soul may rejoice with the just,  
 That part of the mortal that ’s left here,  
 If it spoke, would have only to say, —  
 ‘ *Siste, viator !* Drop one kind tear  
 For the homesick heart in this clay.’ ”

These dismal lines had the effect of making the tears, which Columbia had hitherto dispensed with, pour forth in torrents.

“ Oh dear me, Columbia ! ” I sighed, “ you would n’t need to go on so if I was to be laid in my grave this very day. I hear your clothes boiling over, and you always said that made them ‘ as yallow as saff’on.’ ”

Columbia ran to the rescue, and I sat down in the doorway, with my face to the sea, and all the dear world beyond. It wanted only a word

from somebody, and how it would smile upon me, I thought.

“ Well, what day am I to come and begin to wash ? ” I asked with persistent purpose.

“ Oh, my dear, darl’n’ chile, you could n’t live here in this hovel with me ; ’t would n’t be no ways decent for you,” said Columbia, “ an’ *wash !* Don’t speak the word, Miss Rebecca ! What a mess I should be in all the time, with you an’ the floor an’ everything all slopped up, even if it was fit to think of it ! ”

“ Then I must go.”

“ Go where, dear ? ” Poor Columbia’s frightened start was very touching.

“ I’ve had a situation offered me.”

“ Oh, Miss Rebecca ! ” she cried, resting on a corner of the wood-box, as the most available offer of support, and almost turning white with the double emotion of terror at the thought of losing me, and joy at the prospect of some provision for me. “ What kind of a offer is it ? What to do ? ”

“ To engage in the cheering-up business.”

I was accustomed to the exhibition of a good deal of volatility, as well as some stolidity, in Columbia, for she was the daughter of a fugitive slave and a Gay Head Indian. Her vocabulary was a mixture evolved from the three races and conditions which had furnished the

elements of her “bringing up,” especially from old Britannia, her mother. She never failed to accord the proper *ing* to four words : something, nothing, everything, and anything ; but all other instances of the same termination were rendered by a short nasal sound which can scarcely be represented.

“ O my dear Lord ! ” she sobbed, when I had announced the nature of my new opportunity, at the same time laughing against her tears, “ my prayer ’s answered ! Thank an’ praise Him ! for I laid awake las’ night, an’ I prayed the good Lord to kin’ly think of something for dear Miss Rebecca, — to kin’ly help us to find out what ’t was He’d made her for, an’ I said to myself, ‘ There ’d ought to be something for everybody, — something they can do better ’n anything else, — an’ they ought to choose what they ’ll make o’ themselves accord’n’ to that. Now, what ’s Miss Rebecca, fust an’ foremost ? ’ I studied you over, dear, an’ all I could think of was what a wonderful hand you was for mak’n’ everybody happy ; how you could make your poor pa smile when nothing else could, and his heart was broke, an’ how his las’ words was, ‘ Bless you, my light an’ comfort ! ’ An’ you *will* be blessed, dear ; no matter if you never has a thing you wants in all your days, you ’ll be blest. Mebby you won’t be happy, but you ’ll

be blest. An' how cheered up I feel every time you comes here an' sets down with me, though you 'm the one that needs it most! Well, I says to myself, 'If there was on'y some kind of a comfort'n' occurpation, Miss Rebecca 'd make her everlast'n' fort'n' at it,' an' *now* — Who 's to be cheered up, dear?"

"Aunt Maria."

"*Aunt Maria!*" Columbia looked as if she had received an unexpected dash of cold water in her face. Her jaw dropped, her eyes glared, and her joy in this providential interference appeared to be entirely put out. "The dismallest cretur on this side o' the yarth!" she groaned. "Why, she don't think about a mortal thing but sav'n' her soul an' rous'n' up her cirkerlation! If you should make out to cheer *her* up, you 'd set up such a repertation as would make you in demand. You 'd start up her cirkerlation, mebby. She 's a fine case to rouse a repertation on, but *don't* make up yer mind to go there for good, dear. I could n't bear it, — let alone yerself."

"I have n't made up my mind to go at all," I said. "I don't think aunt Maria really wants to be cheered up. What would she do, I wonder, if everything should come right? Do you know, Columbia, I once thought that if aunt Maria's soul *should* be eternally lost, what



everlasting bliss she 'd enjoy mourning over it. It would have seemed more natural for her to offer to cheer me up, under the present circumstances."

"Yas, I know it, dear; that's true; but, you see, that ain't the kind of a woman yer aunt Maria is. What did she say, dear? What did she write to you?"

"Oh, she heard that I was in need of an occupation, and she wants a cheerful companion. The doctor says that cheerfulness will do more than anything else to keep her circulation right. She wants to employ somebody who will devote herself to that object. She is n't at all sure that I am the right person, for she is n't able to have any bowed-down, disconsolate people about her."

This communication was received with a volley of sniffs and snorts from Columbia.

"We're all of us what we was cut out to be, I expect," she said, "so I do' know who's to blame. If it's the Lord's work, I know He'll forgive me, though some say He's turrible quick-tempered. But them ain't my views. Hows'ever, I must say yer aunt Maria's sech stuff that I should think He'd be ashamed to own her. An' she ain't real smart neither, for here's a chance to do the thing that seems to be most sot by up above, an' have it said to her, 'I was poor an' needy, an' ye took me in.' She might

have done something for her soul an' you too, but she's put on the wrong shoe, an' I reckon 't will pinch her. Hope so, I declar'!"

We decided that it would be best to try aunt Maria, or let aunt Maria try me, — there would be a severe trial on both sides, probably, — and when I went back to Mr. Preston's, I was thinking that there might be other openings in the world for the same business, for, I said to myself, if one is really disposed to bring cheer to sad or fretful humanity, it is wonderful how frequent are the opportunities for repeating and resuming the pleasure — or the occupation. One *might* make a business of it.

But *Aunt Maria!*

## CHAPTER II.

### A FOLLOWER OF GRIMALDI.

MY mother's aunt Rachel had been the first wife of Abram Stonebridge, who, after her death, married the widow Maria Beverley, with one son. As uncle Abram was a dear old uncle, we were taught to call his second "companion" (this was the title he gave his wives) aunt Maria, and her son, cousin Morris.

Uncle Abram himself, I always recalled, as I had seen him kneeling at the domestic altar, where I had been used to fall asleep listening to the hum of his long communicative and expository petitions. He always prayed that "the late afflictive dispensation of Providence might be sanctified to our spiritual and eternal good." It was a mysterious allusion, never understood by any but himself. There is a tradition, however, that the clause was introduced after the battle of Bull Run, and never dropped out again, so uncle Abram must have felt it to be appropriate to other matters besides the Bull Run disaster.

But the prayers of uncle Abram being ended, and uncle Abram himself having become a "late

afflictive dispensation," poor man, aunt Maria had been left rather destitute of those daily trials which enabled her to show the Christian resignation upon which she prided herself. She was, in fact, a very well-to-do and comfortable person, to whom life was an easy drifting-on, but she professed to find it a perpetual burden and conflict, and she elected that other people should find theirs so.

It was to this person that I wrote, —

"DEAR AUNT MARIA, — If I can do anything to cheer you, it will give me great pleasure, and great relief, too, for, as you seem to know, I am without a home since father died."

And I added that she should see — Columbia could tell her, Mr. and Mrs. Preston, too — that I was n't bowed down, that I was capable of being cheerful to any degree.

Aunt Maria replied that I might come and try, and Fate, having begun to point in that direction, continued to drive me on, as winds drive little vessels to the rocks.

But it was not until after Mr. Preston had bidden me good-by on the train at Boston, and I really felt myself going towards aunt Maria, as fast as steam and the steady wind of destiny would carry me, that I began deeply to consider what I had undertaken. Then my courage failed, and my heart sank into its lowest and

gloomiest recesses. I remembered the cry of the great *buffone*, when he was advised by his physician to go and see the unparalleled Grimaldi as a cure for his melancholy: "My God! I'm Grimaldi himself!"

Ah, my poor Grimaldi, people of our profession must do what we can with our melancholy!

There was one shimmer of light, however, which came of the memory I had of cousin Morris. In my childhood, he had been a student at Harvard, and used to come down frequently to Plymouth to pass his Sundays with us. It was only when I had grieved myself ill at the loss of a pet ringdove, which the cat had killed, that he ever took especial notice of me. That soothed and comforted sorrow was never forgotten, but it was the comfort, more than the sorrow, which made the indelible impression. Beside every bane grows its antidote. Perhaps cousin Morris would befriend me again, and make life with aunt Maria tolerable.

It is already apparent that he had a specific kindness for weak and unhappy things, but more than that, he had a keen sympathy for all the pains and perils of the human life, and it was from this quality of his nature — from the earnestness and sincerity of it — that there grew a marvelous power to win and to constrain, which he exercised unconsciously, without self-refer-



ence, and drew hearts easily to himself. He protested that every human being deserves whatever compensation a heavenly life may hold, for having suffered, perforce, the hazards of this earthly life; and because of some doubt as to how those matters may be eventually arranged, he took care that those who came in his way should, if possible, meet with a little solace and reparation here. In this way he often surprised some poor fellow, who had ceased to entertain agreeable expectations of his race.

He used to tell a story, at his own expense, with much satisfaction, and those who knew him well understood, as he did not, the invincible charm which won for him what was intended to be very high praise, though it suffered by its ambiguity.

He wanted to return from Plymouth to Boston by water, in the absence of the steamboat, and asked an old fellow, who was taking on cargo at the wharf, for a passage on his schooner. "No, *sir*; he could n't go on *that* craft," the man growled, but after a good deal of material as well as moral persuasion, he yielded rather ungraciously. When they reached Boston, however, the bear held out his paw at parting with cousin Morris.

"Wal, now, I'll tell ye the trewth," he said. "When you asked to come down on my schooner,



I says to myself, 'No, sir-ee! None o' them chaps for *me*,' for I thought you was one o' them *gentlemen*" (with an expression of abhorrence), "but come to know ye, there ain't nothing of a gentleman about ye, and I'm glad ye come!"

A gentleman who helped him a little with the sheets, and who felt a kindly sympathy for the hardness of his lot! To the poor 'long-shoreman, unfamiliar with the species, such a being was inconceivable, for his understanding of the word gentleman was determined by the memory of spurious claims to deference, and of insolence that wounded his self-respect.

But cousin Morris was not one of those anxious gentlemen who lose claim to the title by insisting too much upon it. He liked to feel the drawing of the tie which binds all degrees of men in a common relationship.

There are stories of his childhood which show how the promise and potency of the altruist was in him then; that a sort of religion of humanity was born in him. Since humanity is too helpless, too pitiable, too impossible a god, he could never have enrolled under the literal banner whose motto is "*Vivre pour autrui*," and whose device the young mother and child, but ideally, that banner was over him; its motto was in his heart, and something like its device was the ground of many a chivalrous act and impulse.

And that idea which Auguste Comte entertained in regard to the plan of the solar system, — namely, that it was easy to see how it might be improved, — cousin Morris held with regard to the social system. He was on the lookout, so to speak, for such opportunities as might in chance occur, to set society instead of the universe right. It had such a deplorable tendency to be wrong! Still, he had never done anything about it. He was only ready, and waiting.

But with all his sympathy for human nature, he was distinctly lacking in the ability to read it deeply, and understand its subtle or veiled meanings. He could not always see what was between the lines. An implication would often need to be enforced by setting the facts wide open to his perceptions, for his instinct was wholly of the heart; it did not penetrate or unlock.

He had chosen the medical profession, as a vehicle for conveying some positive help to the race, had finished a thorough preparation for beginning its life-long study, was in practice with, and gradually stepping into the place of, the chief physician in his adopted town.

Now you know even more than I did about cousin Morris, on that day when I sat in the railway train, very much perturbed by the prospect of appearing before him and aunt Maria.

— especially aunt Maria, — with only a very little moral heroism to support me.

It seemed to me I should not take much delight in some other people I was about to meet. As types of those who had impressed me, in former days, there were Friend Reuben Rogers and Mrs. Lovell. Friend Rogers frequently came in from his home in the neighborhood, and sat with his hat on, and his lips pursed up and thrust out, like the projecting muzzle of a gun, from which he fired a well-aimed moral reflection now and then, which my mother had seemed to recoil from, as she would have dodged a bullet. He always finished his remarks with something gloomy, no matter how cheerfully they might seem to have begun ; generally with an allusion to death or destruction. “ Yes,” he once said to my mother, “ thee must find it pleasant to come back here, for here is where thee and thy husband were born, where thy fathers and mothers are buried, and here is where thy own remains will be deposited.” And my mother had looked down at the wasted hand in her lap, and then at me, holding me closer to her side, that I might not see her tears fall. “ Yes, it ’s a fine day,” he would allow, and then add, “ but it ’s borne in upon me to consider how few are the suns we shall see rise and set. M——m ! There ’s a solemn day a-coming.”

Mrs. Lovell was aunt Maria's niece, one of those dreadful women who had written a book. She took the place of the evil one to my childish imagination, for the terrors were great and vague which were excited by the often-repeated caution, "Take care! She'll put you in a book!" And what a cold rill had trickled down my small spine, when she fixed her deliberative eyes upon me, as if she were measuring me for a place in a sepulchral volume!

The prospect of meeting these friends again did not seem compensatory; but there was another, — there was dear Merab Austen, — a second ray of light in the impending gloom.

I watched the shadows lengthen over the flat country, that had remained stubbornly the same, mile after mile, except for the alternations of low growths of wood and rocky fields. We had left the last station before our destination. I trembled more and more. We were about to arrive. At length we rumbled into a dark hole, and stopped. It was the dismal old station of aunt Maria's town. It might have been a portico of Hades. We had arrived, for we had reached the point where everything stops. The trains stop, for they have reached the sea; the ships stop, for they have reached the land; you stop yourself, because you are at an end. You may settle down and doze, and not consider

what o'clock it is. That is to say, some people may. It depends upon whether they are staying with aunt Maria, or another.

I crept timidly out into the dim channel of communication between my past and my future, and stood peering about in the gloom for a way of exit. Directly another face seemed to be peering about in exactly the same fashion; the face of a tall, strong young man, with very gentle blue eyes.

Cousin Morris had come to meet me. "Remember, O follower of Grimaldi," I said to myself, "none of this dismalness! Much depends! The stage is ready; your spectators are waiting; you have the signal; *entrez!*"



## CHAPTER III.

### IN AUNT MARIA'S TOWN.

“REBECCA! I was looking for a little girl, and behold a girl five feet eight!” cousin Morris said, as I gave him my cold, trembling hand. “And yet you are little,” he added, still holding the hand, and seeming touched by the deplorable lack of other dimensions to agree with that inordinate height.

His manner was very kind, but when we came out into the daylight, and I was seated beside him in the carriage, I could see that I was under wondering inspection, for my extreme nervousness had begun to escape in what seemed a good deal like light-heartedness. I was not at all like a girl who had lost anything, or who needed to be consoled, whereas, cousin Morris had come to meet a sad girl, in a coal-black gown and hat, who had lost everything. No doubt, in his large store of sympathies, there would have been something applicable to such a case as this, if it had chanced to be called for, but my mother, having been bred a Friend, had never felt a need to express her sorrows to the world with the

explicitness of bombazine and crape. We had never worn them, though our relatives, with the same antecedents, reveled in them, and the "customary suits of solemn black, the dignified 'haviour of the visage," were the matters with them to denote one truly. But a rather chatty girl, wreathed in smiles, with a navy-blue suit and straw-colored necktie, with feathers on her hat that Columbia had freshly curled! What connection had these with grief and mourning? The peculiar and definite interest which would have attached to the other sort of girl, in a soul ever yearning to be pitiful, died in the birth, probably, as I continued in *allegretto*, with a good many trills and runs, a movement which the news of my sad circumstances had begun with a plaintive minor chord. The effect would be, naturally, disappointing. Cousin Morris was easily moved by plaintive minor chords, — they were agreeable to him, — but how could he have liked them followed up in that light, skimming fashion? He answered me with commonplace good nature, as we progressed toward aunt Maria.

The long street through which we passed was the market-place, where all the chief emporia of the city were in array. The shops, that tried to be alluring, and flaunted as much as they dared, looked out from under the sober brows of low

one and two story wooden buildings, while here and there a parvenu brick pile seemed to flout the humble lower orders. They were all absurd in their defiance, each of the other's fashion. Every individual abutter had had a distinct idea or purpose of his own, and no line was continued farther than was necessary to frame a door or window, to project a ridge-pole or mansard. Custom could never stale this infinite variety, and over all there was an air of satisfaction and repose which would have made the fitting atmosphere of the just man's midnight slumber. The few people we passed might have been going to their devotions. An occasional vehicle made a great fuss in getting over the cobble-stones, and ranging down through the street, at wide intervals, came its successors.

All this comes distinctly to my mind, with the recollection of that rattling progress over Purchase Street. I see again everything which contributed to the impression of those intermedial moments; the towering white wooden tabernacle, of which there was a story of my great-grandmother having prophesied to one of its founders, when it was raised above the heads of the astounded citizens, "I tell thee, Thomas, the cost of it'll bring more souls to repentance than all the preaching that'll ever be done in it."

Opposite the tabernacle was the long, low

wooden hotel, shaded by horse-chestnut trees, — the *élite* hotel of the little city, — and at the other corner a stone sanctuary, on three sides of whose square tower the town clock stared down at the successive generations of men. As we passed, the bell set up its five-minutes' peal for the hour of six, the hour when the quiet thoroughfares were wont to be enlivened by a sober temporary bustle, for it was the signal for labor to cease, and families to gather round the tea-board.

I tell myself now that while I was making these observations I was making a mistake.

Our carriage, after a couple of turnings, brought us up before the door of a plain brown house, in the centre of whose front was an invisible green door, with a mark on it, where the brass knocker had been, before a certain phase of modern improvement, previous to the present renaissance period, set in. Above the door were two bull's-eye lights, and above that a triangular pediment. The green door-blinds were fastened back, and on either side of the three or four door-stones was a small front-yard, each with a shrub of *pyrus japonica* in bloom. An old wistaria, growing at the southern end of the house, with a trunk like a tree, peered round the corner, climbed the roof, embraced the chimneys, and let its exquisite blossoms and leaves

down like an airy lambrequin, all along the eaves in front. It was a mystery how aunt Maria came to allow nature such a revel on the very roof of her house.

It was the house that uncle Abram's father, the boat-builder, had erected for himself, at the summit of what he had considered a very prosperous career. Uncle Abram himself had bought into ships with the proceeds of the boat-building, and had had relations with oil and bone and candles, so that his first wife's sons were able to live in Boston, in full view of the Public Garden, but his widow and her son still remained in the old homestead, with the wings of their worldly aspirations apparently folded.

A moment's dread, a silent ejaculation, and I had entered the invisible green door. Aunt Maria received me with a faint phosphorescent gleam, which disappeared so suddenly as to seem more like a feat of magic than a smile of welcome.

The thin, white, solemn face over which it flitted, and the abnormally long and fleshless hands, one of which slid chilly into mine in token of greeting, — reminding me of the cool things that live in the grass, — were the only points of light on the field sable which she presented to the eye. From throat to wrist, and downward to the floor, she was as black as a



raven, in justice to the memory of uncle Abram. Her black and white hair, even, seemed to have been a prevenient and appropriate gift of nature, and her jetty eyes looked mourning through a pair of mournful black-bowed nippers. It seemed to me that I had been called to a large field of labor.

With girlish courage, I embraced the whole field at once, and smiled down upon it. That is to say, I threw my arm about aunt Maria's shoulders, and kissed her. But she wiped away the kiss with a handkerchief which would have been solid black but for a tiny square of white in the centre.

I wondered what she meant by that, but forbade the uncertainty to found a new prejudice. I had many hopeful doubts, as well as discouraging convictions, in regard to aunt Maria, and said to myself what I had heard somebody else say, that "the most important and beneficent truths were doubts once."

As she disposed of my kiss, aunt Maria remarked that I had a startling manner.

Her own manner, in which remonstrance and resignation were usually nicely mingled in about equal parts, appeared to have an overbalance in favor of the latter quality upon this occasion.

Something had evidently happened to call her Christian spirit into exercise. These were

disagreeable exigencies to everybody but aunt Maria herself. It was not my arrival. She was evidently pleased with that, if she could ever be said to be pleased with anything. She was, beyond doubt, fancying with satisfaction what a trial I should be to her, and how uncomfortable she should be able to make me. But this pleasure was offset by something which she had barely decided to accept and include on the long list of her trials.

She looked me over comprehensively, with her little close-set eyes, observed my persistently smiling countenance, my dress and hat, and I think that, at least, she was satisfied with my unsatisfactoriness. Cheerfulness was what she had reason and right to expect of me, considering what I had come for; but again there was probably too much of it. It was difficult to touch just the right point.

I had a few moments in my room, when I could draw one long sigh, and repeat the ejaculation, after which the examination continued.

"Rebecca," said aunt Maria, pausing, with the teapot in hand, to look fixedly at me, when we were seated at the table, "I hope you feel as you ought, all that has come upon you."

I was unprepared for this thrust at the unhealed wound, and it hurt so that the tears might have come; but what sort of a beginning

would that be, I reflected, for one who had undertaken the great Grimaldi's profession? I wanted to excel, to be illustrious, so I continued to smile, as I replied to aunt Maria, —

“I don't know how you think I *ought* to feel, aunt Maria, but the way I *do* feel is this: that if there is so much as one only thing in life that is bright and pleasant, *that* I mean to hold on to; and if there is n't such a thing, I'll make it, — I'll *be* it, myself!”

I thought that was a good sentiment to open with, and I felt encouraged, buoyed up, by my own little speech. The pitiful smile with which it had begun grew, by the time it was finished, into an exponent of genuine courage and hope. I believe I had a way of lifting my chin slightly at these accessions of confidence — these waves of optimism — that kept my spirits afloat. One might have said it was a light, nonchalant creature. There is so much to know before we can say what anybody is!

Aunt Maria did not altogether approve of my declaration, or the manner of it. That was legibly written on her long, narrow face, which, by the way, was exceedingly like the tables of stone on which the Law was written; and, to make the likeness perfect, the law was all there.

But cousin Morris, having made up his mind to accept me for what I was, — for better or

worse, — pushed back his long, fair moustache with his napkin, as if preparing for his most open smile. He did smile then, and said, “Why, she’ll be a godsend to our new patient, won’t she, mother?”

At this, the balance went altogether down in favor of remonstrance, with aunt Maria. Her head made two little jerks, and she shut her lips so tightly that she had only a straight line for a mouth.

“I should like to hear about the new patient,” I said. “Who is it?”

“I’ll tell you after tea,” promised cousin Morris.

“No, *I’ll* tell you,” aunt Maria promptly added.

“Oh, you shall have the floor first, mother, and I’ll make the concluding argument,” rejoined cousin Morris cheerfully.

Neither was quite ready to listen to the story of the other, it appeared. We were to have two entirely separate performances, and with aunt Maria eager to begin, cousin Morris almost as eager to conclude, and me very curious to hear, we did not linger over our tea. When it was finished, cousin Morris disappeared, while aunt Maria and I retired to the parlor, a place, by the way, quite awful in its dishonesty and duplicity.

It was a low, broad room in an old-time house, that should have been furnished with the solid mahogany and oak of the sincere days from which they had come down to uncle Abram; but these had been condemned to the garret and back regions of the house, while, though there was a distinct air of decadence over all this maltreated apartment, it was a decadence which had nothing to do with the historic past. It was of the day, of the hour, of that period which is sure never to be revived, for it was the decadence of the nineteenth century, and "however far the rage for revivalism may be pushed, nobody will ever want to revive the nineteenth century."

Mr. Leslie Stephen finds satisfaction in that thought, and I might have done so too, as I seated myself on a gilded tripod of modern contrivance, and surveyed the glaring incongruities about me. There was a sense of violation everywhere, from the inappropriate lace hangings that lay in yards of superfluity on the floor, to the floor itself, covered with garlanded Moquette, consistent only with a vast French salon. Truth, beauty, relation had all been offered a sacrifice, at some time in the past, to a passion for having the newest thing. There were pictures unglazed and without margins, in heavy gilded frames, which promised to be oil paintings, and turned



out to be chromo-lithographs. There were things purporting to be bronze, which upon critical examination proved to be of traceable relationship to the kitchen stove. There were marbles and alabasters that would have made a sculptor turn sick. People express themselves in these things, and it will be doubly descriptive to say that there was hardly a genuine, frank, consistent object in aunt Maria's parlor, unless there was consistency in the uniform absence of what should have been there.

How I would have liked to see the shells, the sea-fans and mosses, the carved and woven things from those far-away lone isles, where they carve and weave the long, slow, superabundant days into their boat-paddles and war-weapons; and other things that had been made by people whose histories are as old as the story of creation; heathen, if you please, but whose whole lives went to the beginning of something well. These had rejoiced my mother, when she was a little girl and had visited her own aunt Rachel, but they had been traded away long ago, for the alabaster abominations and marbles, by aunt Maria.

As I placed myself upon the tripod, aunt Maria cried, "No, don't take that seat, Rebecca! Don't you see, it was n't meant to be sat upon!"

"Why, I was n't sure; I thought may be that

was what it was for; and you call it a seat, aunt Maria," I answered.

"Suppose you suggest an improved name!"

I thought of cheat, as one that would at any rate rhyme with seat, but I only said I should think such things might as well be nameless, as you would n't need to mention them much.

"Can I sit here — perhaps?"

"Why, no; the satin's getting frayed on that divan, and I see one of the casters is loose. Here, sit on this tête-à-tête; don't tumble the tidy; and for mercy's sake don't put your feet on that stool!"

I pushed the stool away, and sat bolt upright, with my hands clasped in my lap, in order not to touch anything that had not been recommended to me, while aunt Maria placed herself in the opposite corner of the same reliable support, and her story set out.

"To begin with," she said, "Morris has got a kind of specialty, — some disease of the heart."

"O aunt Maria!" I exclaimed, pressing my hand to my own heart. But aunt Maria, paying no regard to my interruption, continued: —

"He does n't think it's remarkable enough to do as my father did, to give people a lift in their goings and comings into and out of life, and take care of them in the measles and mumps and whooping-cough and chicken-pox and scar-

let fever, their bad colds and pneumonias and general complaints, in the mean time, but there happens to be some new disease of the heart that nobody yet has ever cured, and he thinks *he* can. Nothing else is of the least consequence."

"Oh, then he has n't got it himself?" I asked, with an easier breath.

"Not he! But imagine! A boy just out of school, so to speak! I don't wonder the Faculty are all against him. But what does he care? He goes right on hunting up hearts to cure, as if it was the most sensible thing in life. He's found one now that he's going to bring directly here — into this house. Yes, and not only her, but her daughter. What do you think of that?"

"I should think it might be a capital arrangement."

"*Capital!* Is that the way you're going to cheer me, — taking sides against me, to begin with?"

"You asked what I thought, aunt, and I say I think it might be a capital plan. It might be the means of cousin Morris's triumphing over the Faculty. What if he should cure this woman, and have a disease named after him? He ought to have every facility and opportunity possible. Just think! To have a Beverley's disease! Beverley's disease of the heart!"

“Fiddlesticks! And of course it must be the heart,” pursued aunt Maria, “but not the *whole* heart. He’s determined not to be too general. To make it as special as possible, it’s only a piece or appendage of the heart. Why could n’t it have been the *whole circulation*? But no, it’s no matter about me. Some person down in New Jersey — that’s general enough, I hope — must have a disease that nobody ever heard of until after he was born. It looks as if they were made for each other, — he and his disease, — and came into the world together.”

“Then you don’t know the new patient?”

“Don’t know anything about her. She heard of this notion that Morris has got into his head (other doctors think she can’t be cured), and she wrote him that she would like to put herself into his care, and asked him to recommend her a boarding-place. What does Morris do but go down to New Jersey to see her, and tell her she could come here — into this house.”

“Well, physicians often receive patients into their houses.”

“This is *my* house, if you please, and it is n’t a boarding-house nor a hospital: the daughter is n’t a patient; and nobody knows who they are, or what they are. Morris has n’t undertaken to find out a thing.”

“But I’m sure cousin Morris could judge,

having seen them ; and you would want him to do whatever was best for his patient, in an important case," I said, with comforting intention.

"Nobody *yet* has said to the contrary," aunt Maria declared, straightening herself. "As far as I *know*, it has n't *yet* been intimated that I have n't shown the right spirit in this matter. If it's God's will that I should have these things to bear, I hope it will at least be allowed that I showed myself resigned."

Quite unexpectedly, she arose and left the room, with her mournful handkerchief pressed to her eyes. Her performance seemed to be prematurely cut short ; but no, directly I could hear it going on behind the scenes. My professional duties seemed to be in requisition. I carefully considered, diagnosticated the case, and concluded, as you often do, my good doctor, to let nature work. It worked hard for a while, for the thought of her resigned condition was very affecting to aunt Maria. I could hear her sobbing over it for some minutes. Then a spasm of remonstrance set in. There was an interval of suppressed ejaculations, when she fell back into resignation again, and the struggle was over. Resignation had won the day. In order that you may understand the technicalities of this narrative, you must know that this implies a very dismal state of things indeed, for a day or two.



The crisis had hardly arrived, when I heard cousin Morris's step, and his low pleasant voice speaking to some one, as he passed through the house.

How came aunt Maria to have such a son? Just as thorny shrubs do bring forth sweetness, I suppose.

When he reached the room where his mother sat, I heard him say, "Well, mother? Give me your hand for ninety days! Ever the best of friends, ain't us, mother?" and the low sound that followed told me that there was, privately, one amiable spot in aunt Maria's heart.

She was left, then, absolutely resigned, after all, to look over some letters and journals that cousin Morris had brought from the post, while Morris himself came to the parlor. I wondered how he endured the place, but I understand now that he never contested his mother's whims. He looked about him with a little frown of annoyance, as if seeking hopelessly for a safe place to bestow his solid person, — his more than six feet of frame, with its magnificent furnishing of sinews and muscles, — and then said, "Would you mind coming over to my territory? I feel more at home there, and I want to show you a cool, quiet place where you may feel at home yourself, whenever you find the door open. When it is shut, the chamber is in session, — there are grave matters going on."

We crossed to the other side of the house, to a room that was low and large, like the other, but to me it was the "ease after pain" which "doth greatly please." The quiet tones were peace after discord. The simplest room in the house, yet everything in it was something you would like to look at; though it was no museum of pipes and photographs of girls, *par exemple*, and, mercifully, there were none of those revolting anatomical things, — those French realistic reproductions of the dissecting-room, that young physicians are wont to affect in the pictorial decorations of their sitting-rooms and offices.

Yet never mind what was n't there; there was one large spot of richness on the matted floor, — a fine Bochara rug, that cousin Morris had bought of an Eastern trader at Funchal, in one of his recreation voyages. The furniture represented some of the discarded old veterans of the house, of sound integrity, and highly susceptible to the flattery which polish had bestowed upon it.

I looked about a little on entering, and could see, without any very rare powers of discernment, that the man who had given the character to this room, though the face which he turned to the world was a joyous one, had a definite taste for something that was a trifle otherwise.

He liked *something with a tear in it*, at the same time that his plan of life was to banish tears from off the face of the earth. A picture, a poem, a song, a voice, an eye with that tear in it was better to him than gladness itself. The very hour of day which suited him best was the hour when the dews — which, if you are inclined, you may call tears — hang on every lid of nature inanimate. Opposite the old arm-chair, where he always sat at his table, and on his right hand, where it would get the slanting half-light that was most favorable to it, were two pictures which told you that. The first was a clear, still twilight in the fields; the other, a cloudy afterglow of sunset on sea and shore. This last was his own work, and made the professional artists among his friends cry out with envy of the swiftness, the simplicity, the decision of touch, which had produced such a declaration of real power. The book-shelves so filled up the walls that there was little room for pictures, but among the few was that one which Ruskin calls “one of the most perfect poems which modern times have seen,” “The Old Shepherd’s Chief Mourner,” and some strong, effective wood-engravings were pinned to the doors. Without exception, there was some human emotion in them all, and always of the graver, tenderer sort. Among the other ornaments, everything had a

little history, and was of genuine worth. Some of these came home with the Bochara rug, some had been picked up among the old navigators of that seafaring region, and others were his own gleanings along various shores, — things that aunt Maria just longed to sweep up and throw in the dust-barrel.

I stopped before the “Evening on Sea and Shore,” and wondered at its sombreness, to which Morris replied, “Well, you know —

“ ‘The clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober coloring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality.’ ”

“I almost wonder you did n’t resolve to paint, instead of keeping watch o’er man’s mortality as a profession.”

“There was a time when I would have liked to do that.”

“And what hindered?”

“Well” — He seemed to speak reluctantly, dropping his eyes, and slowly readjusting some tiny instruments in a case on the table. “You are hardly old enough to remember what happened at ——.” He mentioned a place which will always be remembered in connection with a terrible railway accident, from which he had safely, but painfully, escaped.

“After that, I could n’t sit quietly mixing colors and laying them on,” he continued.

“Those cries rang in my ears, and at length seemed the groaning of the whole human race. I felt as if I must be up and doing something to ease all this misery. Nobody would have been the better for what I could do to a bit of canvas, but if one builds up a poor scrofulous wretch, or sets a broken bone now and then, he seems to be doing better than pitying the moaning race of men. He has some amendment to offer it.”

“And you offer to amend its hearts! I’m greatly interested in that. Tell me about it,” I said, placing myself in an inviting and reliable arm-chair opposite that of cousin Morris. He followed my example, and sat leaning his elbow on the table, with his earnest face bent towards me. There was never another like it, I thought, and I have often noticed since, how the merest baby could see that it was the face of one who had love and help to bestow. His eyes seemed to be always full of a hopeful solicitude, and his mouth, what you could see of it, had such a promising, encouraging sweetness, that one needed to take care and not to expect too much of those dumb promises; yet his square, honest chin assured you that he would steadfastly keep every one which he actually and consciously made. He was not adorable, — Heaven forbid! There are already “more saints than



niches." Besides his positive merits, he had the negative one of never seeming faultless. He had, in short, the defects of his qualities,—of some of his most lovable qualities,—and they were kept under an effect of irrepressible daylight by his frankness, which was so much the better, I thought. One could the more easily estimate him, and this I began to do at once. We never get to the bottom of one another's characters, because — it has been said — we are too inattentive, or too much occupied with ourselves. I was ready to confute this assertion.

But the gift I especially admired in cousin Morris was the rare one of seeming to have something to offer which would put the facts of life into a more hopeful and improved aspect. He was rare in a way that would never make him remarkable, and charming in ways that left the chief merit to nature.

"Oh," he said, with a sudden perception that the shadows were gathering,—his perceptions came often as a surprise to him,— "we'll have the lamp! I won't impose the pensive hour!"

"Please don't impose the lamp yet," I pleaded, for the sun was just down, and the windows were open upon the old garden, which extended back to the street next above the one on which the house fronted; uncle Abram's garden, in

which he had delighted all his life ; which had consoled him, poor man, under many an “afflictive dispensation.” Aunt Maria had been indulgent to things here, in making her revolutions. Everything was entirely charming. The spot had been kept simple and sweet, just the same, year after year, since anybody in the family could remember. The same crocuses and tulips and fleurs-de-lis and striped grass seemed to return again, spring after spring ; the same peonies and golden lilies, the very same stars-of-Bethlehem and larkspur and cock’s-comb and sweet-william to sweeten every summer ; the same marigolds and dahlias and asters to warm the autumn days of every year. Aunt Maria bestowed so much endeavor elsewhere, that these things enjoyed a corresponding immunity. She had n’t yet introduced the newest things in flowers. All along the board fences, on either side, the roses were in bloom, and there were violets hidden somewhere, the evening breeze confessed. Absalom, a very important personage, was sauntering about in the garden with a watering-pot, followed by Rip, a sleek and inquisitive English bulldog, who pushed a wire door open, and stepped in, at the sound of our voices, sniffed and considered me, with the air of a keen critic in human specimens, and his conclusion seemed to be that here was a harmless one, whom he

could afford to tolerate, in spite of that foolish, wheedling tone she had in speaking to him. Having settled that, he took a prominent position, where he could keep a general eye upon things, both within and without, while with his other eye he slept.

“I want you to learn to know mother,” cousin Morris began. “I want you to understand some little peculiarities, which very few can understand. At present she is perfectly happy. Does that surprise you? I don’t believe we ever quite know when we are happy. We are never ready to believe the time has come. It is either far behind or before, or, at best, just about to arrive. It does n’t reach us. That is the way with mother. I have had to learn to choose for the dear old lady, in some things, and in that way she sometimes gets just what she likes, without knowing it. There’s a superadded force in her which must have vent, or we get that unfavorable symptom which we will technically call — ah — *nerves*. You must n’t take to heart all the small anxieties with which she amuses herself. She could n’t live without them. Now, these people; I would n’t have had them come here if mother had really objected. She said of course, “Do as you choose; don’t mind *me!*” in a fashion I know, and she will be uncommonly satisfied if they come, and disap-

pointed if they don't. This Mrs. Kenneth's case is the most interesting one I have ever seen. Dr. Godwin himself has never heard of a more perfect one, in all its indications. The malady is one that I have studied with care, and I have certain opinions of my own with regard to it, that have excited discussion. The study of the disease and the demonstration of my theory absorb me intensely, and mother's interest in the matter, you may be sure, is second only to my own. It was absolutely necessary to bring the patient here; impossible, otherwise, to make suitable arrangements for her. She must have perfect calm and comfort, which would be impossible in a hotel or boarding-house. The advantages are mutual. I am accommodated as well as the patient. Her daughter is indispensable to her; so there are all the conditions arranged by fate beforehand, you see. Nobody need be troubled. It mustn't trouble you, though I will say that it was your coming which made the plan seem feasible. You can come between mother and my patient, who may not understand each other at once. You can be my ally, my assistant, if you will, for one important essential for Mrs. Kenneth is cheerfulness. She must be light-hearted, free from worry, and you are a living, breathing *gaudeamus*, — a *nil desperandum* in the flesh. It is strange where I got

the impression that you were quite different. I thought of you as a sensitive, tender-hearted little thing, made to suffer and be comforted, while, on the contrary, you seem made to rejoice and give comfort. I had a great store of consolation laid up for you, that there seems to be no use for whatever. So our dreams fade ! ”

Cousin Morris smiled upon me thoughtfully, as if with regret, as he pulled Rip’s ear, and I smiled back again, quite cheerfully, I hope ; yes, quite as a cheerful person would have done, I am sure, while Rip roused up and looked from one to the other, to discover, if he could, why his ear was pulled, and what all this smiling was about.

Then cousin Morris talked with me about my own affairs ; about my old home ; about poor old Dick, and dear old Cam, and darling little Milly ; and still I smiled and smiled, for there was great danger that I should break down and ruin my professional hopes. Aunt Maria might step in at any moment, and I had told her she should see ; she had told me I might come and try. There could be no doubt but that I was trying. I was glad of the gathering twilight, and presently, when cousin Morris got up to light the lamp, I excused myself with a compelling recollection that I must unpack my little wardrobe. I managed to say good-night just before the match was struck.



“Good-night,” returned cousin Morris, “and remember, I could n’t well have carried out this cherished plan but for you. Your cheerful spirit will give just the needed balance to mother’s — little worries, so you can judge how grateful I am to you. I’m glad you are cheerful, but, after all, I do miss the little girl I had fancied, — a little girl with a tear in her eye.”

In the light of subsequent events, it is interesting to consider the incomputable problem of what a timely blaze of the lamplight might have done for me then.

I excused myself to aunt Maria, too, on the same ground, — the unpacking. She gave me one of her phosphorescent gleams, — a very faint one, — so faint, so faint, it was necessary to call in the aid of the imagination in order to say it was there, and before you could say it, it was gone. Then I went my own way.

It was necessary to continue “trying” while I unpacked and arranged the night’s toilet, for aunt Maria might have something to say to me; she might come to my door. Her room adjoined mine, with only a door between, which stood open, so that the performance of my duties might continue through the night, if need were; so I swallowed, and winked very hard, and patted my eyes with a wet towel, as I moved about. What! there were roses on the table!

Who could have expected that of aunt Maria? It surely had never been aunt Maria who thought to do that! The surprise helped me, and I looked about at the other adornments of the room with some interest. The Deathbed of Daniel Webster, the Landing of the Pilgrims, and Evangeline, were on the walls. I was glad to have Evangeline. She was a young girl; she was lonely and sad, too; she had lost everything. I seemed to have companionship, as I stood before that picture, repeating the descriptive lines on the margin: —

“ ‘ Sat by some nameless grave,  
And thought that perhaps in its bosom,  
He was already asleep,’ ” —

Then I went about thinking of Evangeline more than of myself; of that weary, futile journey of life; the mocking possibilities that escaped her — always, always; and that was looking a life over from beginning to end, in which way alone all its mournfulness can be apparent. To a girl of seventeen, such a destiny, looking from the beginning, seems impossible for herself. Evangeline and I had some things in common, to be sure, but she grew old with her hopeless longing, she carried her loneliness to her grave, while I — It was very different; and the contemplation of a fate so much sadder than my own probable destiny subdued my self-pity, and kept me from tears.

One of the most cheerful things in life is that we don't know what graves we are sitting down beside. At seventeen, we never expect to furnish a sad poem in our lives, much less sad prose, and if in twenty years more we make the retrospective discovery that we have, we may wonderingly consider how slowly the lines have been written, how gradually the pages have filled, while we kept such calmness as makes the world seem justified in saying, "She has had a dull life of it, poor thing! As tame and uneventful as any life I ever knew."

It is amusing, if it is n't too sad, how we pity each other for the wrong things.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SOME PECULIAR PEOPLE.

LIFE with aunt Maria could never be dull and uneventful, however. The morning of the day on which our guests from that general region — down in New Jersey — arrived, she needed to be quiet, and did not leave her room; but she directed me from that seclusion in regard to the preparations for those poor things, who were about to emerge from their generalities, and make themselves so special in her eyes. Among these, I was to count the spoons and forks, bring all the extra silver to her room, and promise to keep an eye on that portion of it which would be in daily requisition.

I was wholly absorbed in making the count very sure; so many teaspoons, so many dessert-spoons, so many table-spoons, so many dinner forks, so many breakfast and dessert-forks, all spread forth on the dining-room table, and glittering in the morning sunshine, when I heard the front door open and shut with a moderate bang, after which a tremendous puffing and grumbling from some one who tramped about

the rooms and made himself very much at home, I thought.

“What if it’s a thief!” I said, beginning to gather up my silver as swiftly and quietly as possible, for it was so entirely probable that a thief would creep into the house at the mysterious hour of noon, and stealthily banging the door, go secretly muttering and stamping about the rooms. In the midst of this disquieting supposition, the marauder swept in upon me.

“Ah!” I cried, with a nervous start, but seeing what an entirely respectable-looking interloper it was, I stood still and waited for him to explain himself.

He was extremely tall, as straight and slender as an arrow, with shoulders square and finely set. His coat, buttoned by one button at the top, was like the sheath on an umbrella, and everything about him as exact as the multiplication table, except his necktie, which was altogether untied and flying loosely about. It appeared to be an abnormal state of things, — the condition of the necktie, — but its wearer had an air of saying to himself that he did n’t care a continental! Above this abandon there sat a head of great dignity. The top of it was as bare and cool-looking as marble, while from the sides and temples, there floated soft gray locks, and underneath dark eyebrows, there looked



down at me a pair of eyes as keen and black as a young brigand's. An aquiline nose and rather stern, thin lips finished a face which might have belonged to an old Roman patrician.

"What do you jump like that for, when a person enters the room?" the apparition demanded, in an exceedingly fretful tone.

"Why, it seems to me you have rather a startling way of entering the — the house," I replied.

"I should n't wonder if that was so," the stranger allowed. "Well, what have you been doing to Madam Stonebridge, to get her all stirred up again? I'm sent for before I'm out of bed in the morning to come and settle her down. I'll settle her!" he muttered between his teeth, prancing about again, helping himself to a glass of iced water, and setting the glass down with such a thump that I was sure I heard it crack. "What's the matter with the old lady now?"

"Oh, you're Dr. Godwin!" I said, with satisfaction grounded upon the certainty that it wasn't a lunatic, after all.

"Well, I know it, Miss Rowena — or Rebecca. Yes, Rebecca, of course. A very fair sort of Rebecca you'll make, when you get your bones covered up. Walter Scott would say so himself. The question, however, is, what have

you been doing to your aunt? What's the matter?"

"Oh, I suppose it's" — I really had no idea what to call it, but remembering that cousin Morris had said that aunt Maria's infirmities might be technically called nerves, I continued, "I suppose it's her nerves."

"Nerves! *Nerves!*" cried the doctor, in an alarming rage, seemingly. "Good God! my dear young lady, I adjure you, by all your hopes of happiness here and hereafter, *don't* let that word get into your vocabulary! Upon my word of honor, there's no such thing! This *nervousness*, as it's called, is nothing but wind in the stomach! — and devil in the wind! How do you like it here, so far? Are you pretty miserable — eh?"

He fixed his stiletto eyes upon me in a fearful fashion. It was quite different from the pleasant, dreamy, blue-eyed gaze with which cousin Morris had judged me. It was n't nearly so agreeable. It looked through the smile on the surface, straight clear through your body and soul. You could n't deceive Dr. Godwin; you could n't tell him much about yourself that he did n't know the moment he set his all-seeing eyes upon you.

I assure you, the same beaming smile I had preserved since the moment I had set foot in

aunt Maria's town beamed its brightest upon Dr. Godwin at this moment; and that was all the answer I gave him; but he came nearer, and bending over me, said in a tone which he might have used if he had been proposing to me to assassinate the President of the United States and all his Cabinet, —

*“ You ’re as homesick as a little pigeon under a barrel ! ”*

Then two big tears, that had made my eyes feel swollen and uncomfortable for several days, dropped incontinently on the hand which the good old doctor had placed upon mine. He patted my head with the other, while he said, “ But I ’n your father, you understand ! Do you hear me ? Look up here ! I shall be a father to you. There ! You be a good girl, and you shall marry my son John ! ”

Let me explain that Dr. Godwin was only figuratively offering me the highest emoluments and rewards that earth had to bestow upon the most exalted worth. The phrase “ my son John ” seldom failed to escape him, under some pretext or other, upon favorable occasions. “ My son John ” was, I believe, a man of about my father's age, who, having permanently settled himself in some remote region of the earth, would never be aware of the lavish disposition which his father was making of him.

Dr. Godwin wiped my eyes with his own fresh pocket-handkerchief, which, after all, smelled a little of valerian, I thought, as if there were hasty concessions to nerves now and then.

I was mortified at being treated so much like a baby, and, turning away, brought out my own handkerchief.

“H’m! I thought so! So much the better!” said my promised father-in-law at this little touch of self-sufficiency. “Well, Rebecca — It’s a pleasure and a mercy to be able to speak to a girl by the name of Rebecca — or Hannah — or Jane! Such a confounded raft of Mauds and Mabels and Ethels as we have had launched upon us! I call a girl one of these whenever I don’t know her name, and nine times out of ten I hit it right. Now, Rebecca, if I like you as well as I like your name, and you like me as well as I like you, what capital friends we shall be — eh? If anything goes wrong, you just let me know, will you — eh? And *adopt the motto of the State of South Carolina!*”

Saying his last words as he went, the good soul hurried upstairs, for aunt Maria had been heard crying out to know what was the matter down there. She had heard the doctor arrive, and long before that had been in a high state of exasperation at some hours of delay since her urgent summons. Now after this second delay,

what a scene there would be, I thought, holding my breath with the expectation of hearing little short of execration, with the usual lamentation, and very brusque responses. What was my amazement, then, to hear a right jovial peal of laughter from the doctor, followed by a merry monologue, which never ceased for more than an instant at a time, until it finished with another gush of laughter, and the doctor's step was again heard on the stairs. He merely looked in, as he passed out of the house, to shake his finger at me and say, "*Remember me — and my son John!*"

Such enormous pleasantries and two large tears were sufficient to counterbalance all the small annoyances of the remainder of the day. At evening, the new patient and her daughter arrived. I represented the hospitality of the house in the absence of aunt Maria, who counted her pulse at half past five o'clock, and discovered that she was still unable to come downstairs.

What a silent, shrinking creature that little woman with the most modern disease of the heart appeared to be! She might have been a woman of not more than thirty years, yet her daughter's age, which was probably eighteen, placed the mother's liabilities in that respect considerably farther on. Her extreme slight-



ness and quietness made me feel as if a spirit had feebly materialized. She would have been entirely brunette but for her rather fair brown hair, which had not the faintest tinge of gold or sunshine. It looked like the things my Quaker grandmother used to wear, — soft, lustreless, fine, pleasant to touch and to look upon, by persons of quiet tastes. Her complexion had not failed, probably, to be compared to a glass of champagne, for admirers of that peculiar tint, when they are many, always include a few to whom that is a favorite simile. There was no color in her face, except the clear champagne tinge, the red of her lips, which were only faintly red, and the remarkable dusky eyes, so shaded by their lashes that they never seemed to reflect a ray of light, but to rest, not always quietly, under sunless, nocturnal shadows. I was immensely interested in her from the first moment, aside from her having that rare and incurable malady of the heart. She affected me like religious ceremony, with faint music and dim lights; and the sombre rich colors and the silver cross which she wore completed the impression. There was depth in the mother, which I felt sure we should never fathom; but as to the daughter, she was simple and transparent enough, apparently; very much like her mother, however; her mother more fully grown; her mother with a

gleam of gold, a touch of sunshine, and the shadows in her eyes supplanted by something like that June radiance. She was a peculiar mingling of shy reserve with a sort of persistent jubilation, and she seemed strangely pleased with the port into which she had come, but strangely fearful, too. I had seen people glad and afraid to arrive, but I thought no one ever came to anchor in a strange, indifferent sort of place with such an air of thanksgiving and praise, and no one was ever thankful in such a doubtful way.

As to her doubt and timidity, I could sympathize with these, but her gladness was out of all proportion to anything that might have been supposed to account for it.

Yet there are glad temperaments, to be sure, that find fruition everywhere. And it might be that this new hope for her mother had lifted a sorrowful weight; that abundant thankfulness leaked out and overflowed at whatever vent it could find. I was not, after all, much surprised, until in passing quietly through the hall, near their half-open door, after tea, I heard Mrs. Kenneth say, —

“*Il a l'apparence de sûreté, Marion.*”

And the girlish voice reply, —

“*Oui, oui, maman ; nous sommes en sûreté — ici.*”

It happened that the chief things I had gained at schools were a little French and a little quickness of perception, — just enough to understand that these people were congratulating themselves upon having arrived at a place of safety.

What had been the previous dangers, I should have liked to know. I had never heard that New Jersey was an exposed or defenseless region. During the evening, I asked Miss Kenneth, incidentally (and thereby impressed her, I suppose, with the meagreness of my conversational resources), if there had been any serious epidemics of late, down in New Jersey. She said she believed not. And was it a pretty healthful region, usually? Oh, yes, especially in the part of the State where they had been. So the peril was not of that nature. I considered the matter with increasing interest. If they were generally subject to insecurity, was it of such a nature as to involve their neighbors? I lay awake that night, fancying sudden explosions; dynamite down cellar; the house surrounded by assassins or incendiaries. And were there not dangers of persons who were in extreme requisition, — danger of pursuit, of discovery, of — Heaven knows what wild notions did not seize upon my fancy, and aunt Maria's words returned to me: "We don't know who they are or what they are."

One thing they surely were, however, to state it in brief and common words: they were decidedly queer. Lovely, — why, yes, — but queer. And the extreme slenderness of their baggage was also queer, considering that they had presumably come for rather a permanent stay.

But the frank light of an exceedingly luminous morning, when it dawned, entered even into the lurking places of my suspicions, and I was ashamed of them; especially when I took Mrs. Kenneth a cup of cocoa, and those deep religious eyes of hers fixed themselves upon me as if in mournful reproach.

Directly I had left the room again, two pairs of eyes seemed to follow me. They looked down from above; they looked up from below; they looked out upon all sides; a pair of sombre, watchful eyes, and another pair, smiling, but wistful and anxious beyond expression.

Aunt Maria was still secluded; cousin Morris had advised his patient to rest after her journey, and breakfast in her own room; he had been obliged to go out early himself, so that Miss Kenneth and I breakfasted by ourselves.

There was a certain aloofness on her part, which made our little converse quite different from the usual frank chit-chat between girls. I tried to draw her near, — to make friends with her. It seemed so like the indulgent provision

of a good old fairy godmother, that there should come another young girl into that rather lonesome house!

I freely told her how glad I was that she had come, and that I was sure to feel more at home in future.

"Then you're not at home, — you're a visitor," she said.

"Not exactly," I replied. "I'm in the exercise of a profession. I'm cheering up my aunt."

"Why, I'm a member of that profession, too," she told me. "That is my occupation, to cheer my mother. I have thought only of that since I was so high." She measured a distance of about two feet from the floor. "That is what gives me such an hilarious manner; for what is the use to say that life is delightful, — that everything is right, — and then not be delighted? I never confess that there is anything sad or disagreeable — never have since I can remember. It won't do, you know, for mamma is inclined to melancholy."

By degrees we went on a little more after the manner of girls, expressing our individualities, our convictions, suppositions, and assumptions, and I even went so far in my rush of confidence as to tell her about having lost my home, and everything, and how hard, how impossible it had been for me to find an occupation, before I had come to cheer up aunt Maria.



“Did you try writing a book?” she asked, as if that were a common occupation for girls of seventeen.

“Oh, no, indeed!” I answered, recoiling from the suggestion, with thoughts of Mrs. Lovell. “I could n’t possibly do that; or even if I *could*, I *could n’t*, for I was obliged to do something that would make a place to stay in, at once. Persons must have covers that they can run into, out of the rain, while they’re doing those things, I suppose. One could n’t sit down, like the Muses, on the side of a hill.”

I did not mention my little treatises on the woman’s work question, over which I had consumed so much feeling, as well as ink and midnight oil. I told her everything but that, and she told me nothing at all; nothing of her home, and her family, her friends, and the experiences of life in which they would have been concerned. She ought to have friends innumerable, I thought, and yet she mentioned nobody; nobody at all, except her mother. Her confidence was all in the abstract. She did, however, speak of many places where they had lived, — chiefly foreign places, — which made me think they must be restless people.

“*I* should like to write a book,” she said, after gazing musingly for some moments at the sprays of honeysuckle, that nodded at us through

the open window. "I should like to talk all out!"

"I wish you would," I exclaimed, with the emphasis of my baffled desire. "Why don't you?"

She seemed to watch every motion of the swaying vine, or perhaps the movement of figures in her unwritten drama, before she continued, without seeming to have heard my question:

"I don't wonder there are so many books written. There must be others who have that feeling, who long to speak out, and who are able to indulge it. I never take up a new book — a story of lives — but that I look in it eagerly to see if it has come from some one who had this desire. I am sure it does sometimes. But I know what you think," she added, rising with a laugh. "You think that *my* desire comes only of an inclination to be eternally chatting, at some rate, — at any rate whatever!"

Directly upon the sound of Miss Kenneth's laugh, aunt Maria's bell rang out a loud alarum through the house. It was a summons to me to attend to my cheering-up without delay, and it was also, without doubt, meant to be the knell of any young girl's new-born hope of having good cozy times in *that* house.

## CHAPTER V.

### A SHOCKING SCENE.

THE old house, however, seemed to come to life, in spite of any deadly purposes of aunt Maria. There was frequently a rustle and silvery ring, as of something cheerful happening. In the morning, Miss Kenneth's voice might be heard caroling or chatting, among the earliest sounds. Her light step flitted hither and thither, sometimes to the garden, which seemed to bloom and smile more abundantly by her presence. Even Absalom appeared to regard her as an extra touch of fair weather. She was at once deep in his good graces, and came in to breakfast laden with flowers, which made of the common repast a floral festival. Yet her gladdest notes were not all glad, and it seemed to be hinted to me that under this bright photosphere there revolved a world in shadow. Through little rifts I had quick glimpses that surprised me into a desire for clearer insight. But I was not born for a discoverer, nor for the reception of revelation.

The Kenneths spoke a good deal to each other in French ; it appeared to be a matter of habit. Their talk was like the innocent prattle of one sober and one merry child, and it pleased them extremely when I took pains to have them discover that their favorite language was not an unknown tongue on the shore of Buzzard's Bay.

The chatter of French and Miss Kenneth's laughter were matters which called my aunt to a sense of the varying nature of her duty. She arranged it with her conditions as speedily as possible, and came out of her retirement.

"I declare," she said, "that girl's animal spirits tire me to death ; and I never had such an awful sense of the ungodliness of the natural man as I have when I look at her. There ain't a minute when she has a decently solemn sense of the responsibility of an immortal soul."

The proportion of happiness which could be safely allowed at aunt Maria's, considering that we were immortal souls, was very small indeed, and it must be confessed that she was successful in averting the danger of too much.

Miss Kenneth became suddenly more timid and anxious, and Mrs. Kenneth looked a little more depressed when aunt Maria sat at the head of her table, and doled out a meagre remark to her guests from rare time to time, keeping her head rigidly fixed on the occipital pivot,

until some sparkle from Miss Kenneth shocked it into a spasm of jerks.

If Miss Kenneth came smiling and radiant to her place at table, and with a gentle, timorous look at her hostess, said, "What a lovely morning! It reminds me of that little Bedouin song, so full of joy, which begins, 'Morning lifts the shadow from my tent and from my heart,' — all about the gladness of morning, you know," — aunt Maria would reply, "I don't know any such song," in a tone which put an end to that subject.

My aunt liked to choose her own subjects of conversation, and they never by chance grazed against such matters as poetry and song. Her world was of solid prose, and she was planning to have a heaven of the same material. To be sure, that would make a hell for some people, but it was part of this plan of hers that there should be few tastes to gratify in settling the heavenly estate, and that something corresponding to her own taste should regulate the standard.

Happily Mrs. Kenneth was so absent, so absorbed in her own thought, that, with her, aunt Maria's peculiarities seemed to be unregarded, and Morris and I managed it so that there was not often occasion for these meetings. The patient had her meals chiefly in her room, and



seemed not at all inclined to make a social matter of her relations with the household.

I could help my cousin in this, and in many ways, and it was somehow a peculiar delight, a happiness which grew to have such a quality, that in spite of all the disagreeable moments which fell to my lot, I can remember fancying that I had never been so charmed with life. Sometimes, in the quiet hour when I was alone in my own room, — alone with Evangeline, — I would stop and say to myself with surprise, “What am I so glad about? Has anything happened?” But no, nothing especial happened.

Cousin Morris had many patients who were his beneficiaries, and frequently asked me to go to them with comfort and help. On Sunday afternoons in particular, when aunt Maria was shut up and locked up in her room, attending to some very especial concerns of that important soul of hers, I used to go out on missions to souls and bodies of less consequence. These were the hours that aunt Maria had at first allotted me for self-examination, in which I was to consider my acts of the past week, their motives, their probable results, and make new resolutions for the week that was to come.

“Why, aunt Maria,” I had said, “while I am sitting here for hours, thinking about myself,

poor Mrs. Dodge will be shut up there with her sick boy, pining for a breath of air, an hour of rest. *I could n't !*”

A stimulating essence of Abou Ben Adhem, which I had imbibed with the morning's Unitarian sermon, was still working among the moral forces, and I added, —

“I don't believe I have any motives ; but perhaps I love my fellow-man.”

“*That's* evident enough,” said aunt Maria, as if now we had come to the root of the matter, and I was puzzled by a new peculiarity of disagreeableness in her tone and manner, which was not sufficient, however, to put me off my purpose of making my visit, instead of hunting backward after sins, or squaring up such liabilities as would enable me, in aunt Maria's opinion, to start on Monday morning with only the balance of original sin and Unitarian delusion against me on Heaven's severe record.

To do Aunt Maria justice, she did think it just barely possible for a Unitarian to save her soul, yet so as by fire, and I was therefore quietly left to my chances. Though she was rigidly orthodox herself, she admitted such bare possibilities as would leave a small margin of hope for her heterodox relatives, — for cousin Morris, at any rate, — but as for her own immortal part, she would not venture to trust that to any but

iron-bound certainty. The simple creed *I believe that I don't know* was not largely in vogue in that part of the world. Almost everybody either believed, or believed that he believed, something, though he might not be clear as to what that something was, and so enjoyed a religion of opinion, which was apt to be leavened by the opinion of Mr. Emerson.

But where others, as anxious to be candid as they were to be saved, only ventured to say "I believe," or "I hope," aunt Maria said "*I know!*" and so shut and locked the door against her chief danger. It is not impossible that aunt Maria has, indeed, laid hold of the ultimate truth. If so, it may be set forth in some other treatise, by aunt Maria herself. Awaiting this possible illumination, it will be of minor interest to know that the beautiful town in which my aunt dwelt had, itself, furnished immeasurable light to the world, — and lubrication as well, — so that it has been worthily called "*The Light of the World,*" but gradually lost its claim to that title, as whales became scarce, or were superseded by oil-wells. Then this enlightener of the nations fell idle, and lay drowsily along its low hillside, on a caressing arm of Buzzard's Bay, waiting for something new to turn up. It had its beauty and its riches, and it seemed content.

But there were a few spots of blemish in that beauty. Up over the hill, there was the unexplorable region called Africa, and down below, near the water's edge, the region known as Fayal, where the viola tinkled all night, and the wild minor songs of the Portuguese mingled like a pang of regret with the wilder wickedness of the mixed population that hived on its borders. These were not places where young girls could go with help, though there was need enough of every sort; but there were streets that withdrew, that turned virtuously aside from thence, and resolved to be respectable; whose inhabitants, though among the city's poorest, were above the lower degradations of poverty. Here there were quiet and decency, and here it was that I meant to call on a Sunday afternoon, and asked Miss Kenneth to come with me. It was the time when her mother would be sleeping, and she said she should be charmed.

"I'm afraid you won't," I answered. "I'm going to see a little crippled boy, — a great sufferer, — but his sufferings will soon be over. We may find them finished already."

She made no answer then, but as we went on our way, rather silently, she said with a tremulous touch in her voice, "I have never seen death. I don't know what it is like. It must be terrible!"

"I ought not to have asked you to come," I answered self-reproachfully.

"But I want to come," she hastened to assure me. "I am trying always to be strong, and it will help me."

But that possible first encounter with the awful mystery made her very grave. One incident alone interrupted her thoughtful quiet. We passed through streets where the inhabitants were out of doors enjoying their rare leisure on their doorsteps, for lack of lawns and verandas. A small girl, as we passed, hopped off her seat in a doorway, and ran with outstretched arms, crying "Fader! fader!" to a stalwart young man who appeared delighted by the performance. His face shone, as he lifted his precious mite, and carried her in strong caressing arms.

Miss Kenneth stopped abruptly, and stood gazing after this pair, her dark eyes slowly dilating, and her lips parted with a singular appearance of interest. I waited until it seemed that she needed to be aroused, and then asked, —

"What do you see?"

"Is n't it *beautiful*?" she murmured, turning slowly back to me, the soft lambency of her look falling upon me through a mist.

"Beautiful?" I repeated vaguely.

"That little girl and her father. To me it is a dream. Just as other girls dream of a lover, I dream of a father."



"Then you don't remember your father?" I ventured to ask, and she answered, —

"No."

And presently added, with a smile, that to be always father-sick and homesick was improving her few opportunities to be miserable, was n't it?

But what place was she homesick for? I would have liked to ask her. Though, to be sure, one may have all the acuteness of the craving without ever fixing the thought upon any dear locality, for there are nostalgic natures; constitutions that pine in all climates, they know not for what dimly-remembered or foreshadowed places. Sick for homes they may never have seen, they go so to the end of life; always strangers; always restless with a desire to return, or to push on, and find their own.

We had not to climb the conventional flights of rickety stairs to find Mrs. Dodge. She would have been quite on the ground but for her floor. One of her front windows displayed candy and pickled limes in glass jars, part of a bunch of bananas labeled "Two cents apiece," a small basket of oranges that were more costly, some toy whistles and cheap Japanese fans. The other windows were wide open to the breeze, which, however hot the day had been, came fresh and cool from the sea in the afternoon.

I opened the door softly, without knocking, and was called upon to come in. A little ghastly face lay on the pillow of a bed that was drawn up under an open window. I watched for the smile of recognition it had been wont to give me, but it did not come. A younger child was trotting listlessly about the room, while Mrs. Dodge herself sat rocking slowly and wearily in an old wooden-seated rocking-chair by the bed. On the floor beside her was heaped the work she had thrown aside; a fishing-net, with the shuttle and bar; and in a corner a pile of finished nets lay folded ready for market. She was the simplest kind of New England woman, bred on one of the poor little farms a few miles back from the sea. She got up heavily, and feeling, perhaps, that this was a time for especial ceremony, shook hands with both Miss Kenneth and myself.

"He won't speak to you again, Miss Parm'ly," she said. "I think he's a-going, and not a prayer said over him! Oh, me!" — turning away to weep — "none o' my folks ever died before without somebody to say a prayer for 'em. Miss Parm'ly, could n't *you*? I hain't the gift myself."

"O Mrs. Dodge," I said, "the desire of your heart is a prayer!"

"Like enough 't is," she answered, "but it don't seem like addicated prayin' — spoke out.

You might say 't would do to put some grass on his coffin, after he 's dead, but I'd a good deal ruther have a few roses. 'T would be a sight o' comfort to me if you 'd pray, Miss Parm'ly. I'm hopin' every minute the doctor 'll come. *He* would, the Lord bless him! but it might be too late."

I had never heard my own voice praying, except as a child, under my mother's guidance. To adjust words to listening mortal ears seemed to make a performance, and I shrank from so solemn a performance. Yet almost anybody would be willing to do a more difficult thing even, to comfort a poor mother at such a moment. Almost anybody could say something, — could say the Lord's Prayer at any rate. I set the basket of fresh fruit which I had brought upon a table, and knelt at the bedside, while Mrs. Dodge bowed down beside me, and Miss Kenneth sank, awed and pale, into a low seat between the foot of the bed and the outer door.

I had scarcely breathed the first petition, and Mrs. Dodge was just beginning to utter those solemn groans of participation which mark the proper form with those to whom expression is the chief function of bounden duty, when she bounded to her feet, snatched the basket of fruit from the acquisitive hands of her youngest son, boxed his ears, shut him in a farther room, and

then, returning, sank upon her knees again, and resumed her groanings, as placidly and naturally as if they had never been interrupted.

“*Ex-cuse* me, Lord! Go on, Miss Parm’ly!” she murmured, with an indescribable air of observing all the proprieties at once.

A distressed sound from Miss Kenneth arrested me again, and I glanced anxiously up at her. Some overtense cord had snapped, and she was — *laughing!* laughing piteously, with all the abandon with which she would have wept if the sudden revulsion had swept her in that direction. She commanded herself in vain.

Happily the suppressed sound was like sobbing, and Mrs. Dodge, “flattered to tears,” sobbed too, with a feeling, doubtless, that everything was going right, while I, in the eager hope that the prayer would quiet or screen Miss Kenneth, prayed with a fluency and fervor that surprised myself, and abundantly gratified Mrs. Dodge.

At the height of Miss Kenneth’s paroxysm, at the height of my fervor, at the height of Mrs. Dodge’s sobs, at the very summit of untimeliness, the door quietly opened and cousin Morris stood upon the threshold, transfixed by the shocking scene.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SELF-CROWNED.

THAT evening I sat by his library lamp, waiting for cousin Morris to return, trying to be absorbed in his books, but thinking more of an expression I had seen on his face. In turning over the contents of the table, I was arrested by this : —

“I am really at the point of finding out that this world would be worth living in without any lot of one’s own. Is it not possible to enjoy the scenery of earth, without saying to myself, ‘I have a cabbage-garden in it?’”

I shut the book slowly, and turned impatiently from a view of such dreary contentment, considered as a possibility. No lot of one’s own, and life still worth living ! I stared with wide eyes at the great serene orb of the lamp, as if taking in light by which to see how that could ever be. The scenery of earth was delightful to me, for the reason that I might yet have no mean cabbage patch in it, but a broad blossoming garden, with perfumed paths, that would lead me to the



Mecca of my dreams. My expectations of life were florid, in spite of the facts of that present time, which tended persistently to discouragement. But, persistent as some facts were, there was a tremendous force against them. There was youth, and there was hope.

Permit the intrusions of youth and hope, — those hackneyed conventions of human history!

As I continued to consult the books, after the fashion of one who asks but a casual favor of them, one accorded me a wise new opinion; another a foolish old theory, or a new view of some old theory; this a poetic thought; that a prosy observation; but “*Let no flower of the spring pass by us; let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered,*” said the last one of all.

It was an agreeable proposition. “But how to do that, where the roses are out of reach?” I responded. To this appeal my oracle was silent, but it will be seen that there was a way, and that I presently discovered it.

At the same time that these two views were under consideration, — no lot of one’s own, and life still worth living! and the plan of crowning one’s self with rosebuds, — I continued to observe the movement of the clock-hands and the occasional rumble of wheels, or the click-clack of footfalls on the flagged sidewalk without.

Cousin Morris might come driving or walking, so that every sound was a promise, and every one false, until half past eleven o'clock, when there was a quick, firm step that proved to be entirely true, and brought him at last.

"You up, Rebecca?" he said, in a low, surprised tone, as he came to the library door. "You ought to be asleep." Yet he looked pleased.

"I wanted to tell you — I could n't sleep until I had explained something, — explained about Miss Kenneth," I said.

"It's a pity you gave yourself the trouble," Morris returned, resigning his purpose of sitting down, and standing beside his chair with an appearance of unusual decision. His clear face, glowing from his rapid walk, had shown an inward radiance, too, which was quickly clouded by a shadow of annoyed recollection.

"There! I was afraid you would come just at that moment, and not understand, and be horrified at the sight!" I bemoaned.

"And that is exactly what came to pass!" Morris returned, in a tone so cool that the weather itself seemed to refrigerate on account of it.

"But you'll look at it differently, if you'll allow me to tell you," I pursued, with warmth enough to restore the summer temperature again.

"Miss Kenneth is really a most sympathetic girl."

"*In-deed!*"

"She was greatly moved at the sight of poor little Joel, for she had never been in the presence of death before. She wanted to go with me, because she said it would help her. She is trying to be strong."

"That is a very good plan."

"If you had come sooner, you would have seen for yourself, how impressed, how unspeakably pained she was. But presently, when she was wrought up to the last degree, there came a sudden revulsion. When you've gone to the highest point, you've got to come down, and in this case she lost her balance, poor thing, and the result was most distressing to herself, I do assure you."

Here I related the episode which had marred the solemnity of the hour at Mrs. Dodge's. But there was simply a great void in that locality where cousin Morris's understanding of such phenomena ought to have been.

"I admire the beautiful charity of your explanation, Rebecca," he answered, a little of the radiance returning, "but I am more than ever amazed that such a trifling incident should have been noticeable under those circumstances. There was death; there was the solemn act of prayer for the dying;" —

"But people have been obliged to laugh when they have been performing the solemn act of dying themselves ; that man who had the quinsy, for instance, whose laugh saved his life." I brought my fingers down firmly upon the table, and Morris looked at their meagreness, as compared with the emphasis they gave to the argument, with an amused smile, but he shook his head in an utterly discouraging way ; it was such a gentle way, such a way of being altogether willing to accept my view, if his conversion could be in any way possible.

This is the most exasperating kind of obstinacy. The dogged, willful sort may give out, but the sort that would yield if it could, that has made up its mind it never, never can, is what you may give up all hope of. And I did, as cousin Morris continued, —

"The lightness of a nature which could have been so overcome by a small absurdity, in the face of those circumstances, is a spectacle that not only amazes, it repulses me."

"I expected something so different," I sighed, rising as I spoke, and adding "Good-night."

"You cannot too constantly remember not to expect much of ordinary man," was cousin Morris's instructive reply. "Good-night," and he offered his hand in his usual kindly fashion.

"Oh, I'm so disappointed!" I persistently

cried, "not to win my case, and to leave you entirely mistaken! The worst of it is that Miss Kenneth will be sure to guess how you feel."

"No, no, never fear that! It would be an unhappy state of things if our bearing towards people must needs correspond with the faults we find in them."

As a closing remark, I said, —

"Well, it seems to be a rule that we shall suffer for our mistakes. I shall be glad to see *you* suffer remorse."

"Amen, if I'm mistaken. Now let us not talk of Miss Kenneth any more. She does not interest me. I want to speak about a girl called Rebecca. Is she content? Is she happy? I wish she would report to me sometimes. That would interest me very much indeed. We wonder every day how we ever got on without this Rebecca. We never can again, — never, — for she makes herself very dear to us, you must know, — very dear and indispensable."

Cousin Morris still kept my hand while he spoke, looking at it and laying his other hand over it gently. How could he guess the life-time effect of that touch, that tone, and of that cherishing look that he allowed to fall from his beautiful eyes down, down, deeply down into that tender locality so ready to receive all that it could mean?



We talked a moment longer. He told me of the little Dodge boy, who had gone; praised what he called my loving-kindness towards the poor child; and then I floated away, buoyed up by the most airy of hallucinations, and dropping into the little chair by the window in my room, sat smiling out into the darkness, and making the most of a blissful supposition. How I weighed his distracting "we." Did it include aunt Maria? Did she find me "dear and indispensable?" Had *she* ardently resolved that she could never more live without me? What did that matter? It surely included cousin Morris, and I easily excluded everything, — everything besides, — and accepted the declaration undivided, unparticipated. Such declarations, to be sure, were not apt to be made with a plural pronoun, but exquisitely veiled, only suggested, was it not all the more subtly beautiful and sweet? To guess the rest; to see it only half revealed! What plain, full avowal, what explicitness at all, could more definitely or amply have declared that I was dear and indispensable to my cousin Morris?

## CHAPTER VII.

### FRIEND MERAB.

WE had reached August, each with our own especial conceit. Mine was thriving finely. It not only kept me raised to the topmost heaven, but it was on account of it that I used sometimes to escape to the old garret, and sit among uncle Abram's discarded furniture. There, at the little window in the south gable, gazing out between the dripping tendrils of the wistaria, I had my day, — that day in which I praised the smiling heavens and said it was enough ; that "were there nothing else for which to praise the heavens," it was enough.

From the height of my window, one could look out over the embowered roofs and towers and spires of the city to the blue of the bay, and where that faded into the gray of the distance, I cradled my chimera.

What beguilement in a horizon ! What helps to delusion in the blue-gray distance ! And is it worth while to have been beguiled, for the sake of such hours as those at the garret window ?

What would life be worth without its illusions? "*Il n'y a plus d'illusion à se faire! Tout est fini!*" said Madame Récamier.

And it happened that at another window, — a window of the house next to aunt Maria's, — just across the green yard spaces, another face frequently looked out, — a face with the faint mist of a Quaker cap clinging about it. It was not looking after horizons, however. Turning up towards the city, instead of down towards the sea, it had a limited view.

It was the face of Friend Merab Austen. She was one of those proscribed ones, who might be said to have had no lot of her own, but had begun a life-time of self-surrender by renouncing her youth. The eldest of twelve children, she had, from the time she was old enough to be trusted with a baby, been a faithful nurse and guardian to her often-repeated brothers and sisters; and when these, grown to manhood and womanhood, had married and gone, the aged parents had taken their places, and been children to their child. It was not until they had been laid in their graves that Merab had given thought enough to herself to discover that she was growing old, and she had at the same time a new and bewildering sense of having nothing left which demanded her care; to suffer a tedious freedom, which was too strange to be pleasing. She be-

came as uneasy under it as most persons would under the weight of new obligations. So as she moved about her empty house, fulfilling her empty duties, she stopped now and then to look wistfully out at the windows, and one day she looked up and saw me at my garret window, gazing industriously out at my horizon.

“What is it thee sees, Rebecca?” she called up to me.

“Oh, I see my ship,” I returned with a happy laugh.

“*Thy* ship!” repeated the dear soul. “Why, I have n’t heard of that.”

“So I must come and tell you, dear,” I answered.

“I wish thee would, Rebecca,” said Merab. “I’ve been wondering thee did n’t come in!”

The faint suspicion of reproach in her tone made me blush with the guilty consciousness of having given much time to considering the horizon, when poor, lonely Merab would have been greatly comforted by the same attention.

“I shall make you a professional call this evening,” I promised.

“There’s a good girl!” And Merab turned away from her narrow outlook, and I from my perspective.

It was just at sunset when I fulfilled my promise, and I found Merab watering her flow-

ers and tying up some vines. She was a charming little prim elderly blossom herself, as neat and sweet as the meadow flower we call "the little Quaker lady." Her plain gown of thin gray stuff was covered for her work with a large brown holland apron; her snowy kerchief and cap gave her a touch of purity that made the everyday housekeeper look like a holy saint, and if ever anything looked like exactly what it was, it was she, — Merab Austen, — a most unconscious saint.

The fundamental principles of the Friendly rule of life — the "daily dying" and the "daily growth in grace" — she had insensibly built upon; not with any conscious plan, not by any formulated theory, but by "the leading of the Spirit," as it would have been called in her own form of speech.

And she had that sweet faith of faiths, a belief in her fellow-beings. Even her doubts, such as they were, were mothered by this faith. She doubted evil because she believed all good. If any were morally self-distrustful, she "doubted their doubts away," and with her loving confidence made men ashamed not to be the worthy souls they seemed to her. It would be a pitiable case indeed, of one to whom she refused her trust. The more wretched the object, the more ready she to open the door of grace to it.



It was just at the moment of my arrival in the garden that the kitchen-door swung open, and Merab's old domestic, Hannah Shaw, appeared, thus berating a repulsive stray cat, wild with terror of human kind, that had come in search of accidental provender: —

“Thee take thyself off! Sk! sk! thee dirty, sore-eyed thing! Thee's covered with fleas from the tip o' th' nose to the tip o' th' tail!”

“No, no.” Here, puss, puss, puss!” Merab called out from behind the trellis of her Madeira vine, where she had been watching the unsightly beast “with larger, other eyes” than Hannah's. “Thee give the cat some milk, Hannah, and put a good parcel of cream in it. Thy own small experience ought to make thee sensible that it's little we can do to ease the miseries of a creature that's *covered* with fleas.”

Even Merab's hopes were not for herself, unless we except the crowning hope of those days we are now considering, which was the earnest one that somebody might need her.

She stood gently patting her apron, and bidding me to notice that the moon-flowers were opening; and I watched with delight the slow untwisting of their pale-green spirals, and the sudden outspreading of their milk-white odorous disks, until Merab had seen the cat comforted, and then we mutually turned to each other.

“Come in, come in, and sit down by me and talk,” said Merab, gathering up her strings, while I took the watering-pot, and when these had both been disposed in exactly their proper places, and Merab’s apron removed, she put me into her mother’s large arm-chair with rockers, while she took a small one, that had belonged to her sequence of sisters in their ungrown days, and drew it up beside me. The twilight was gathering, and deepening the soft sombreness of everything in the quiet sitting-room. The light wood-colors in the briar-figured carpet, and the pale-brown chairs, with their flag-seats painted a yellowish white, were the high tones in the room. On the large round table, with its bluish-gray wool cover, stood Merab’s desolate work-basket, and a silver porringer from which she had fed every one of her eleven brothers and sisters successively ; on the high mantelpiece, the clock, that had a picture of the dove returning to the ark on its door ; and flanking that, a row of glittering candlesticks, a sea-fan resting against the wall and some shells ; above, hanging from a brass nail, a picture of William Penn treating with the Indians, in a narrow painted frame.

There was a mahogany chest of drawers, too, with a book-case on it, that had glass doors and revealed four or five rows of books which had furnished the family culture — both mental and

spiritual. These Merab had heard read from the word "Preface" to the blessed word "Finis," over and over again, for it had been her father's custom to read aloud to his family every evening, from the stroke of seven until the stroke of eight, thoroughly finishing one and beginning another until he had traveled through them all, and then again, *da capo al fine*. If visitors came in, they were reinforcements to the audience; there was an instant's pause for handshakings, and then on went the reading, on and on, until the predestined moment struck.

These dull memories were sweet and sacred to Merab, and the house that enshrined them was as a temple in which she, as sole priestess, kept the holy fires burning. Nothing would have tempted her to leave it, or so she thought.

It would have soothed the sorrows of such as suffer with fastidiousness to look about that house. It would have been balm and delight to tried noses and eyes if they could have penetrated into its out-of-the-way nooks, into the prim cupboards and the neat, sweet drawers, that held the vessels and vestments of the temple.

Merab took her knitting, for when she was not looking after somebody who needed her, she was doing something that somebody needed. She was never idle. Fitful odors from the wet

flower-beds crept in, and peaceful, monotonous sounds: the drowsy murmur of life from the community in the grass and foliage, and the unhurried transit of people through that quiet street of a contented little Quaker city. The air was oppressive with the sultry languor of the season, and Merab gave me a paper fan with brown speckled sticks, and a restful display of nothingness upon its unfolded face.

We usually drifted promptly into some subject connected with my mother, whom Merab had known from the day she was born, and for whose sake she loved me, for it had hitherto been the case of a homesick girl needing comfort, but this time Merab leaned towards me with an intent look, as if discovering some new trait.

Her needles slackened their speed a little, as she said, —

“Why, this is a happy-looking girl enough. What’s become of that Rebecca I was sorry for?”

“Oh, she has changed her views,” I answered, with light movements of the fan. A heavy heart moves her fan with a heavy hand.

“She is pleased with something, I see that,” said Merab.

“She is rather pleased with the universe,” I announced, laughing as easily as full cups run over.

“Well, that is the best news I have heard in a long time,” said Merab, her motherly face beaming with sympathy. “That is the good of being young, and of having young companionship, I suppose, too. And now I can guess who it is I hear laughing and singing so often. It is thou.”

“*I?* Oh, dear, no!” I answered. “The laughing, singing girl is the patient’s daughter.”

“It — can’t — be!” said Merab, letting her needles come slowly to a full stop, while she fixed her eyes upon me wonderingly. “I know *her* quite well. She comes to the window, and looks up heavenward as if she were praying, — I might say imploring. Some days she comes often. I’m getting to watch for her.”

“That must be the mother,” I said. “She is always mournful and troubled.”

“No, no; it is the young woman I have seen with thee in the garden. I know them both. The daughter looks the most troubled of the two.”

“I’m surprised to hear that,” I said, musing, as I spoke, upon these contradictory manifestations, which set Merab’s presentment of Miss Kenneth so entirely against my own. “She is the one who furnishes all the gayety in that house. Perhaps,” I added, out of my passion for explaining things, “perhaps she goes to the



window to hide her other feelings, as people do in novels."

"Do they?" Merab looked at me eagerly, as if I were bringing her strange news from regions she could never venture to explore.

"They frequently turn away to a window, and go through an inward struggle."

"Poor things, — po-or things! And does thee think this young woman is passing through trial?" Merab asked anxiously.

"I think she is strange, and it is not a pleasant kind of strangeness."

Here Merab dropped her knitting altogether, and her ball of yarn rolled to the floor, which brought a hitherto invisible gray kitten down from somewhere among the shadows.

"I can't think of anything else, Rebecca," said Merab. "That girl is never out of my mind. A labor of heart attends me on her account. Tell me more about her!"

It must be explained that Friend Merab was innocent of the vice of gadding. Call it even visiting, and she was guiltless, for she had been too busy at home all her life, and her sisters had fulfilled the simple social offices of the family. Though aunt Maria had been her next-door neighbor for twenty-three years, Merab seldom came to see her. Besides never having acquired the habit, she perhaps did not feel drawn in that

direction, and aunt Maria's health was, of course, much too miserable to admit of her paying visits. There was an occasional neighborly interchange of superior jellies and cakes, but beyond that, the intercourse between the two houses was so infrequent that although the Kenneths had been with us some weeks, they had never come in contact with our nearest neighbor.

But suddenly the attractions at our house were irresistible to Merab, who always indulged a hope towards any one who might prove to be a person who needed her.

Having gone over to talk about my ship, and perhaps confide to her that I was dear and indispensable to one who was infinitely dear and indispensable to me (for it was easy to tell Merab everything), we finished by talking of nothing in the world but the Kenneths. And the result was that the next day, just before tea in the afternoon, — that most charming hour, which is like a soft clasping of hands between morning and evening, — Merab came over with her white gauze shawl on her shoulders, and called upon them, or beamed upon them.

We have all felt vague expectations of undefined blessing at the first sight of some new person, and it seemed as if the Kenneths did, when the little Quakeress, serene, benign, came softly in upon them, as from some better world; — “a world

whose course is equable and pure." Mrs. Kenneth's melancholy eyes almost brightened while she talked, though she spoke of nothing more important than the sultry weather, and the refreshment the afternoon breeze brought from the sea, and the hope that it agreed with Mrs. Kenneth, and that she felt herself improving. Mrs. Kenneth leaned towards her, as tender plants reach towards the sunlight, and Merab made soft sympathetic sounds without opening her lips, at all the periods, while the interesting stranger was speaking, and when she arose to go, she invited the Kenneths and myself to come to tea with her on Friday evening, and Mrs. Kenneth absolutely smiled and accepted!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MISS KENNETH'S DÉBUT.

As I entered aunt Maria's door, on my return from Merab's, I heard the voice of Dr. Godwin holding forth in his deep staccato. He had apparently just arrived, and seemed to be offering his remarks to cousin Morris in the library, but as he stepped back and forth, he had the appearance of casting them round about, for the good of any upon whom they might fortunately fall. Though he was not altogether the same at all times, there was one thing you might depend upon. He was always emphatic.

This is how he was going on : —

“Forty-five, yes, forty-seven years of debt to the young ladies of my time! ‘Mrs. Godwin,’ said I, ‘I’ve squandered my youth, and dissipated the rest of my days, in the haunts of medicine or here at home with you, my dear. I’ve neglected the girls of the last few generations. I have n’t done my duty!’ ‘Well,’ says Mrs. Godwin, ‘it’s never too late to mend,’ and so I’ve come to see what nice girls there are here,

that I ought to be attentive to, and so begin a reformation. Ah-ha! here's one, — here's Rebecca! And is that you, Madam Stonebridge?" he added, catching sight of aunt Maria in an adjoining room, and crossing over to shake hands with her. "I don't owe *you* anything, madam, for I did try — Remember that?"

"Pooh!" said aunt Maria, and I do believe she blushed a little, while Dr. Godwin's merry, young-sounding laugh rang through the room like a smooth run in the bass of a musical instrument.

"'Ere I was old! Ere I was old!'" he mused, with a gentle sigh, as he slowly paced a pensive round with his gaze fixed upon the carpet.

No one but Dr. Godwin could have said these things and been tolerated by aunt Maria. It was wonderful how she broke out into little civilities, and became tolerable herself, under his influence. She promised to forgive some past slights of herself — which she well remembered — if he had only not forgotten her this time. Whereupon the doctor produced a vial of sugar-coated boluses, which he laid triumphantly before her. The effect of the prospective doses was instantly favorable. Aunt Maria lavished a full grown smile upon her physician, took up the article she was crocheting, and pre-



served such a lenient aspect for a few minutes, that I felt a sudden effect of freer breathing.

Dr. Godwin had seen Mrs. Kenneth at times, professionally, when he consulted with cousin Morris, and Miss Kenneth casually, on the same occasions. His keen discernment had surely found something to encourage his habit of research into characters, which interested him as well as constitutions. He had a loudly acknowledged affection for young girls, but distinguished his favorites by a quiet, steady devotion and contemplation, and this was his manner with Miss Kenneth.

I am sure it was she who had brought him out in the rôle of penitent on that hot evening.

"Sit down? No, no; I can't sit down. Bless your soul, *I* never sit down," he responded to aunt Maria's invitation, lightly turning into a measured promenade. "I only dropped in to pay my respects to Rebecca and Miss Kenneth. Rebecca, if you please, just ask Miss Kenneth if she will see one of her adorers. They say we have so much tranquillity here, Mrs. Stonebridge, — such delightful tranquillity, — these roving people who come down to us for a few days at a time," he proceeded, still moving up and down the room with his hat and cane in one hand, while he made appropriate gestures with the other. "'Tis a fine thing, is tranquillity,'

somebody has remarked, — I won't say who, for Mrs. Stonebridge would be scandalized, — I won't mention his odious name, but he goes on to say 'Yes, a fine thing is this tranquillity, but *ennui* is of its acquaintance, and belongs to the family. To repulse this ugly relation, I have set up a theatre!' I'm going to do something of that sort myself! We must turn out this tedious old acquaintance for a while,— this cousin *Ennui*. You and I have shown her too much hospitality, Mrs. Stonebridge. We may wake up and find ourselves grown dull and stupid, some miserable morning. Ah, how do you do, my dear, and how does your mother endure this inclement weather?"

He turned with a benignant smile to Miss Kenneth, who then made her appearance, and having led her to a seat, with old-fashioned gallantry, stood quietly beside her for a moment, bending a half-smiling regard upon her upturned face, while he went steadily on with his discourse.

"I've been thinking," it informed her, "that you and Rebecca would find 'the little Quaker city' a dull sort of place, and I dare say this young man here" (with a nod of his head towards the doorway) "passes his odd minutes in stowing away bits of things in bottles, and watching what comes of it, eh? The consequence is, you

don't know our possibilities, and it remains to show them to you."

He resumed his promenade, and continued: "Next week, you know, we're to have that grand regatta in the bay, and I shall have a swarm of young people at my house, — enough to stock a co-educating college. We shall have to get some sort of craft and take them down to see the racers round the lightship, and you two girls are to come with me, — one under each of my wings, — and we'll see what the youngsters will have to say to that. Put on the prettiest bonnets you've got, and I shall come and fetch you. It's true I haven't had my day yet, but we'll see what sort of a day *that* will be, and *whose* it will be."

"For my part, I thank you very much, but I could n't go, you know," said Miss Kenneth.

"*Could n't?* God bless my soul! Why not?" cried the doctor, turning upon his heel and bringing himself before Miss Kenneth in an attitude of challenge.

"It would be impossible to leave my mother so long."

"There, there! You just leave that to me, my dear," said the doctor. "You be a good girl, and mind me, and you shall" —

I'm sure he was about to say "you shall marry my son John," but he caught my eye just

in time to remember his promise to me, and coughing a little, finished with "You shall see! You shall see!"

The regatta was not to be all; we were to go to his house the evening after. "We're to have something there, — I'm sure I don't know what, — but you may call it, if you please, 'a real good time,' " he said. "That's what my young folks name these things, and they know all about them, I can tell you. And Morris — Are you listening? Come, sir!"

"Oh, I'm charmed with the eloquence of the speaker," cousin Morris answered from the hall doorway, where he stood looking in upon the doctor and his audience, considering, I thought, the one who did not interest him with a grave curiosity. She looked as fine as a ray of light, but pale and worn, and there was something which made me think she might recently have turned away from the window.

"Well, confound you, sir, let the eloquence of the speaker inspire you to come and make your own self agreeable, on Thursday evening," Dr. Godwin responded to his young partner. "Come and help us out in our revels! Come and fetch these young ladies home, at any rate. We can't trust them to any but a good steady cavalier. We shall be a very young set, but a veteran of twenty-seven or eight might con-

descend to us if he were only good-natured enough." And Morris promised to come.

Then Dr. Godwin turned homeward, grumbling about the weather, Miss Kenneth retreated, as she always did, as early as possible from the presence of aunt Maria, and I, fearing that aunt Maria's lapse into lenity would be followed by a dangerous relapse into the more usual condition, hurried away to make her a small individual lemon sherbet, which she liked of a warm evening, and which I had learned to produce by a secret expeditious method, incited by the discovery that lemon sherbet had a mollifying effect upon her.

She accepted it graciously, and sipped a few particles, before she asked, "How long is it since your father died, Rebecca?"

"A year, aunt Maria."

That was all. Whether she was considering, or whether she meant that I should consider for myself the propriety of being quite so happy as I seemed, is uncertain. It is also uncertain whether it was the effect of the sherbet, or of an indulgent purpose towards Dr. Godwin, that there was never a word said against my joining in the revels. Besides Dr. Godwin's magnetic personal influence over aunt Maria, he was the old friend of her girlhood.

I looked forward to the following Wednesday,



as to a day when something would happen, and a new and broad and breezy view of the beloved world was something exactly apropos of my desires. I watched from my garret window, on Monday, to see the yachts flit into the harbor, and, folding their wings, lie placidly rocking like a flock of gulls, some of them looking conscious of superior new arrangements in adjustable centreboards.

On Tuesday the yachtsmen diffused themselves generously and profusely about town, and the sunburned sailors, in their uniforms, garnished the intervals. People were a good deal visited by their friends and relatives, and the little city pulsed with life. Through the clean, shady streets, especially through the long curving avenue on the ridge of the hill, where the dignity of the town is seated, and the more considerable mansions look across at each other from the depths of shady lawns with a reserved geniality, the guest-laden carriages rolled back and forth in the direction of the refreshing drive "around the Point," or the pretty country road "around the Head of the River." The latter brought you back over the long bridge, where you could look from source to sea, up and down the estuary of Buzzard's Bay called a river. This river, flanked on either bank by towns of the highest self-respect, opened a view

of the yachts, and was covered with a variety of craft, coming and going, on visits to the same. There was a general agreeable stimulating feeling of having something of delightful interest to look to, in every cheerfully-minded person's consciousness.

This feeling was a definite and personal matter with Miss Kenneth and myself, on Wednesday morning, when we were all ready and waiting for Dr. Godwin.

How lovely she was, though still in the same perpetual plain close-fitting blue costume, that seemed to be her only resort from another, much like it, which she wore at home. Her little soft felt hat was without ornament, and needed none, set above the sunny hair which framed her fine, thin face, and the soft color which excitement brought to her cheeks. She sat, while we waited, with one arm about her mother, gently caressing her hair. It was as if she had been leaving her for a foreign tour.

Mrs. Godwin, upon the plea that she was being left desolate, had invited herself to pass the day at aunt Maria's, and be Mrs. Kenneth's companion in loneliness. The doctor's wife had already been most kind and attentive to the quiet little stranger, who seemed especially attracted by her large, beaming, soothing presence, for it was not Mrs. Godwin who had furnished

the doctor with his strong antipathy to nerves. The fine, orderly medium of communication between life and her comfortable consciousness was the *pax vobiscum* to his own irritable sensibilities. Mrs. Kenneth, left with Mrs. Godwin, was like a baby in its mother's care.

To be relieved of the necessity of following up the regatta would be a merciful boon, Mrs. Godwin declared, and added: "How tolerable life would be, were it not for its pleasures!" to which aunt Maria responded with an assenting sigh, which plainly said, Yes, truly; how intolerable it was, pleasures and all, — but especially its pleasures.

The doctor's carriage came at ten o'clock to bring the comforter, and take us away. The dear, handsome old fellow was in fine feather and fine spirits. Never to the detriment of his dignity, however. It is difficult to portray a man, nervous, fractious, but gentle-hearted, whose sayings look absurd upon paper, and whose doings, deliberately reported, are as different from the same things seen, as painted lightning is different from the vivid gleam, which is at the same time shocking and admirable. Even his fretting and fuming were done with a certain dignity, or such was the effect produced by the almost majesty of his presence. His merriment had an exquisite quality. It was when

he was merry that he seemed most serene ; that his voice was most mellow in its resonance. He was enchantingly merry that morning. Such a rill of laughter as ran all along with us to the wharf ! In this, however, Miss Kenneth did not freely join. She appeared to take pleasure, in especial application to herself, as a serious, uncertain new mixture, which might easily turn to pain. The wonderful alchemy which she practiced daily and hourly for her mother, of turning anxiety to joy, or at least to peace, seemed to be a lost or forgotten art.

I looked upon this suddenly timorous pleasure-seeker with a desire to see her as elated as I felt. To wring from her some hearty expression of gladness, I said : " It 's refreshing to see you going somewhere, — in such good company, too. You 've kept within sight of the old house ever since you came to it."

" It is refreshing to some people *not* to go," she answered.

" I hope there 's no such abnormal young instance on board *this* craft," said Dr. Godwin, dropping into nautical phrase, as appropriate to the day.

" Oh, no ; no, indeed ! To-day everything is delightful," Miss Kenneth quickly responded. " It is lovely, in going, to think we shall return. Is n't it sad to even suppose a person forced to

go forever? — the Wandering Jew, or the Flying Dutchman. That is the pain of going, — thinking you will never return.”

“Well, I don’t know; it’s a pleasure to think that of some places,” I answered, and then we drove down the wharf.

There was plenty more laughter there, for numerous young people, already on board the little steamer which had been chartered to take us down with the yachts, were welcoming numerous others just coming aboard, and there seemed to be a deal that was amusing, for so much merriment was hardly ever seen or heard, unless at some vintage festival of young Bacchanals, under Etruscan skies. There was just the suppression in these young animals that some geographical variations — some ages of polishing into forms — would effect; just the difference of an Etruscan day, and that soft gray morning on New England waters.

The doctor mixed us in with his other young people, with the good judgment and skill with which he would have added a new ingredient to an elixir. Miss Kenneth was charming. Everybody seemed to perceive that, in spite of a certain shy and silent reserve, which was not exactly awkwardness, yet it was evidently the manner of a recluse, advancing fearfully to answer the social summons for the first time, — the



manner of one unaccustomed to intercourse with anything like society, even society *sans façon*, such as we fell into on that convivial day.

We soon, however, became part of the decorous revel, and Miss Kenneth's constraint gradually disappeared in the general freedom.

The doctor's granddaughter, Jessie Putnam, was chief of the modified Bacchæ. Her witch's eyes, under her jet-black bang, were scarcely wide open the whole day long, for they had that fascinating fashion of narrowing until they almost closed, when she laughed, which gives such mirthful piquancy to a young face. She was her grandfather's treasure, and where his vivacity finished, hers began, — a continuation, in another channel, of the same stream. She wore a blue rosette, with number forty-three in its centre, — the number of the yacht Matchless, though almost every one of the youths who gathered about her displayed a red one, with the number thirty of the Favorita, and condoled with her beforehand, on account of her coming disappointment. She only laughed more, and declined their condolence, offering Miss Kenneth and myself a choice of rosettes.

"But how are we to choose? We only know a few names, or numbers. That does n't help the judgment any," I remarked.

Then there was a great hubbub of voices, pleading for his or her own favorite.

“I’ll wear the number of the one who has the fewest friends,” Miss Kenneth decided, at length, and Jessie Putnam pinned upon her shoulder the number forty-nine of the Wanderer, on an orange ribbon.

“And I always hurrah for the most popular one,” said I, and chose the red of *La Favorita*.

Our steamer was putting out, and we were directly running downstream, between the “City of Belles and Palaces” — to use another of its sobriquets — and the little rural town that sits *vis à vis* to it, the latter fringed, on its southern outskirts, by a thick growth of old cedars, and finished by the ramparts and white-washed brick parapet of the little old pacific grass-grown fort, that had bristled saucily with guns in three wars, and now stands like a simple colophon to the long page of township. Past the island with its lighthouse, past this little fort, garrisoned by grasshoppers, away we go, into the pure odorless air of deep-water spaces; the city, marching down the slope on our right, goes on for a few miles, too, over its lower level, to where, at the Point, it has planted a lighthouse and a granite fort, and stops.

The yachts were to make a flying start from an imaginary line drawn from a buoy near this Point to the steam-yacht *Astray*, anchored off the shore. As we passed the Point, the prepara-

tory gun sounded from the *Astray*. The waters were lively with sails, and with every sort of craft from a tug to a full-grown steamer. Everybody's glass was up, to make out his own favorite among the yachts of the first class. A second gun for starting, a third for taking time, and the beautiful things set out on their flight, working off against the southwest wind, stretching away across the bay, with every sail drawing and close-hauled, to take full advantage of the breeze. And at a respectful distance we paddled along with them; gay, gay, so gay, and even Miss Kenneth surprised us, at moments, with glimpses of a charming *vif*, — the natural assertion of those quicksilvery subtleties of a spirited creature, young and all alive. But in the midst of it, from time to time, as we came together, the shadow fell upon her again, and she appealed to me gravely, "You don't think mamma appeared troubled?" I could see that she was pursued by a fear.

And I was pursued by these questionings: Why are they so much alone? Why have they no friends? Why do no letters or messages ever come for them, when she, at least, wins hearts on every hand? For more than one youth sacrificed the pleasure of his cigarette all day for fear of losing the greater pleasure of slipping into some vacancy beside her. She

looked naively amazed at their little flatteries, and so artlessly indifferent that it piqued the gallantry of her admirers into burning resolve. The pleasure of engrossing a lovely girl assumed all the excitement of the chase, — the excitement that men most love. She had brought a bouquet of yellow roses, and I heard one youth begging with soft abandon, —

“ ‘ Ah, one rose,  
One rose, but one, by those fair fingers touched ’ ” —

But as he looked into the cool, unresponsive depths of Miss Kenneth's eyes, he seemed not to dare to finish, and she granted him the rose as she would have given a biscuit to Rip. There was none of the natural little excitement, — the pretty girlish flush and bewilderment, — the young feminine response to so much masculine ardor. In an hour, she had parted with all her roses, but not with any vestige of her *insouciant* calm.

And the girls showed an earnest interest in her, too, not only by an insatiable desire to know all about her, which put me to great straits, but by real and cordial overtures of friendship.

But the old doctor's devotion seemed the most agreeable to her, and she bestowed her chief favors upon him.

The doctor, by the way, made enormous par-

tial payments that day on his debt to the young ladies of his time, and he did not neglect the elderly chaperons, whose claim was of longer standing, but was busy every moment of every hour, at his overdue devotions.

When I took my own turn perambulating the clear side of the deck with him, it might have been observed that I was immensely proud and pleased, for to me the dear old doctor was even more charming than the newly-graduated Harvard swells, of whose devotion I had received a generous share. But I observed that now and then our conversation flagged, and that his part in it was substituted by a succession of meditative grunts. I looked up, inquisitively, at one of these intervals, and looked longer than I was aware, probably, for I liked the picture he made, as he held his soft hat in his hand, uncovering his splendid head, for a moment, to the reviving breeze.

“There, there, Rebecca, don’t stare so at my bald head,” he said, meeting my contemplative eyes, “and don’t go to making out that I’m a wretched old specimen of anatomy *to-day*, — not *to-day*, Rebecca, — for I can’t live down to any such miserable conception as that. Not a bit of it! I’m as young as any of these impertinents *to-day*. I feel as if I’d hardly passed my majority, except — well, except when I look at that



girl, Rebecca, and then I 'm seized with a weakness that reminds me of my senility. I feel like a soft-hearted old woman when I see that face."

"What face?" I asked, looking over my shoulder, and sweeping the whole tricksy, laughing, flirting throng with searching eyes.

"*What face*, do you ask me? Why, what face do you suppose, Rebecca? How many faces do you see that are enough to wring a man's heart? Eh?"

Just then I caught sight of Miss Kenneth's face, with its half-delighted, half-pathetic smile.

"Oh, you mean Marion," I said; for we had arrived at the point of calling each other "Marion" and "Rebecca."

"Well, who else? Have n't you seen anything there yet, with those keen eyes of yours? Have n't you?"

"Yes, I have; but I thought it was, perhaps, only my fancy."

"There is n't much fancy about me, you perceive, and I see it as plainly as I see that cruel wing on your hat. The hat is gay, but the wing tells of a poor, hunted, put-to-death little thing. Now, what is it? What is the matter with the girl? Have you any idea? Out with it, Rebecca, if you have!"

"I have n't the *least* idea."

"Ah-h! Angels and ministers of grace — Look at her now!"

I followed his eyes to where Marion, having moved away to a place by herself, stood gazing out into the great sweep of untarnished brightness, absorbed in her own thoughts. That phantom which hid under the accustomed smile had come plainly out to the surface. It was a touching face, — the more so for its total absence of self-consciousness.

The doctor drew out his handkerchief, rubbed his eyes, and blew his nose, in an irritable way, as if his eyes and nose were unruly organs that he was bound to chastise, and we walked on in silence for some minutes.

“Bless my soul! Here she comes!” he exclaimed presently, looking from side to side, as if with a purpose of escape; but the words were hardly spoken, when we came face to face with Marion, whose phantoms were again all under delightful cover.

She looked rather wonderingly at the unusual expression of the doctor's face, and his red eyes.

“This confounded dust!” he began, again attacking his nose and eyes furiously.”

“Dust?” said Marion, looking about at the wetness of the surroundings. “It does n't seem to me very dusty. I should say the dust was pretty well laid. *Que voulez vous?* You are like the princess, that felt the two peas under twenty feather-beds.”

“ Well, it ’s the cinders — the smoke ” —

She glanced up at the most negative and inoperative of smoke - stacks, and mercifully dropped the subject, as she turned and placed herself on the doctor’s other side, to walk on with us. She threw her head back, when we came forward from under the awning, as if to take it all in, — all she could hold of that bounteous light and freedom.

Standing so, she watched the flight of a sea-bird, until it was gathered in out of sight by the distance. She was like one astray in some pleasant wilderness, and casually pleased with the pleasantness, at the same time that her whole thought, her whole heart, turned fixedly to where she truly belonged.

Dr. Godwin gave one glance, and then looked persistently away from the quiet face and longing eyes.

For fear he should get more dust in his own eyes, I called attention to the fact that we were nearing the flag-boat in Kettle Cove, Naushon Island. The course of the yachts was to this boat, anchored in the cove, thence to Pennikese Island, thence to and around the Vineyard Sound lightship.

Before reaching Naushon, the gray of the August morning had burned away, and given us a pure blue and gold day, with a clear air,

like that of mid-September. From east to west the long line of the Elizabeth Islands made a barrier before us, but through the openings of Quick's Hole and Robinson's Hole we looked beyond to the hazy cliffs of Martha's Vineyard, lifted and parted from the waters by mirage. Naushon, towards which we trended, with its brown herbage, its deep, woody shadows, and golden high-lights, seemed a gravely thoughtful thing, that could not but smile as it listened to the mutter-mutter-mutter of the ancient sea, saying the same things over and over, — memories of the old Azoic times.

Let us, however, beware lest we, too, mutter the same things over and over, in speaking of the sea, for it is true that "Illusion dwells forever with the wave," — especially the illusion that one can pronounce something new and fine upon it. But no, say what we will, it has all been adequately said before, by Homer or Mr. Black. The sea has been sadly talked about, yet it seems as if one might still venture to say that the aged reprobate spread himself out with a bold indifference to it all, on that day of the regatta, as of yore, and, as of yore, glittered and charmed like the old betrayer that he is.

"How straight this chain of islands throws out from the shoulder of Cape Cod," said an observing young man, who fastened an eye-glass

into his right orbit, and swept the low hillocks with a thoughtful eye.

“Yes; and don’t you know how that happened?” asked Jessie Putnam.

There was an effort to recall the dim results of geologic research in the collegiate mind.

“Don’t you remember,” Jessie interposed helpfully, “that once upon a far-away time, some Triton of the west — a Triton with feet instead of fins — fell sound asleep upon the southern shore of Cape Cod; and that while he slept the sea washed the sand into his shoes, which, upon awakening, and starting onward to wherever he was bound, he found a trifle inconvenient? Don’t you?”

“N-o; ’pon my word, I never heard of that.”

“Then I must be a person of superior information!”

“Oh, I’ve heard of that” —

“Pardon. Allow me to continue. This old Triton found the sand in his shoes decidedly uncomfortable. He pulled them off, and tossed out the contents of one, which made Nantucket; but in emptying the other — by which he made Martha’s Vineyard — he let the sand drip and spill along, and this was the result.”

Jessie waved her pretty brown hand at the Elizabeth Islands, and her listener sank deeper and deeper into the absorbing interest of such a



delightful source of instruction, until we had saluted the flag-boat in Kettle Cove. Then there was a welcome spread of luncheon, as we stretched on past Pesque and Nashawena to Pennikese.

When we had rounded Cuttyhunk, and left the Sow and Pigs reef behind, every sail strained its last thread, and pulses quickened, for we were nearing the lightship. The interest attaching to this point was almost equal to the coming in at the final goal again, and all were intent upon watching this crisis. To the unsophisticated eye, the yachts were a miscellaneous fleet, scattered by random chance, without individual interest, and beyond individual recognition; but we had some furious yachtsmen among us, with keen eyes and improved judgments, devoted to the cause, and good marine glasses, moreover, and to these we repaired for our excitement in the race and its technicalities, as the crowd gathers about a bulletin board in times of national commotion. Posted in conspicuous places, on top of the top-most points, these rampant newsmongers, boiling with eager enthusiasm for the sails they doted on or had bet on, kept us up to the occasion by such outcries as "Jupiter! how the Wanderer is gaining!" or "Confound the luck! how the Favorita (or the Matchless) is losing!" An infinite variety of explosions, but at length we

heard chiefly "By Jupiter!" or Jove, or Cæsar, or Julius Cæsar, or George, and ultimately, almost anybody! how the Wanderer was gaining!

The Wanderer was a new yacht, entered for the first time, that had never distinguished herself, and awakened at the outset only such interest as could be sustained by a general desire to see what might be done by a craft of that peculiar build. The Matchless and Favorita had won many a cup, and enthusiasm had been divided between the two, but the race at length was between three, — the Matchless, the Favorita, and the Wanderer.

I went and stood beside Marion while they reached and turned to round the goal. I somehow began to feel as if something depended upon this event, when suddenly the Wanderer shot across, and cutting in between the lightship and the Favorita, came round ahead!

"Oh, Marion!" I cried, "how could you?" for it seemed as if she were the Wanderer and I the Favorita.

Shouts of surprise rang over the water. The Astray gave short, sharp whistles, as each boat rounded, and the bell of the lightboat rang salutes. Then the yachts piled on their club tops'ls and kites, some fairly staggering under the load, and sailing large, with a free wind, stood out for their ultimate goal.

As we turned to follow, a steam-yacht, carrying a party of men who had come down among the spectators, passed us close alongside. Its passengers turned with interest towards the row of fresh young faces that leaned over the side of the steamer. They were just abreast of us, when a figure stepped forward into a more open line of vision, and with an appearance of intense interest stood gazing and gazing; at length moving astern, as we parted, that he might gaze a little longer. This had not so much an appearance of impertinence as of an absorbed scrutiny of something uncommonly strange and interesting which had unexpectedly caught the eye.

In the last moment of conjunction, another of the yacht's passengers raised his hat, which salutation Dr. Godwin returned. Then it seemed that the inquiring eagerness of the man who gazed was transferred, and brought to bear upon his neighbor, who knew Dr. Godwin.

It could very well have been that a face so enchanting as that which looked up into Dr. Godwin's had made a man wish to look long, and the presence of some one at his elbow who knew the doctor offered possible opportunity for discovering to whom the face belonged.

The incident was soon forgotten. As to Marion, she was wholly unconscious of it.

During the rest of the course, all interest was

in the race. Even those who had been lukewarm or indifferent to that at the start, and had only come down for the sail, were roused to ardor after the rounding of the first goal.

Occasionally some one cried that it was still the Wanderer, then presently, from another direction, a dissentient voice claimed that the Favorita was gaining again. As we drew near the line of the buoy, there was a long, almost absolute silence, broken only by the slow play of the engine and the seething of the water; then shout upon shout, — “The Wanderer! The Wanderer! The Wanderer!”

“Marion,” I said, stepping over again to where she stood quietly gazing, not at the yachts, but up into the broad, bright opening of the harbor; “don’t you hear, Marion? You’ve won the day!”

“Oh, I’m shouting,” she answered, rousing and lifting herself up an inch or two and smiling. “I’m shouting, though you do not hear me. I’m saying, ‘*Vive le retour!*’ You don’t understand? Well, it is probably a worn-out pleasure with you, Rebecca, — this coming back. It is my first taste.”

## CHAPTER IX.

“SOMETHING WITH A TEAR IN IT.”

THE next morning there came and perched by the west window in the sitting-room a presence I had come to look upon as a bird of ill-omen, — perched and sat and made us miserable with his “Nevermore! nevermore!”

It was our neighbor, Friend Reuben Rogers, already mentioned, and his topic was the vanity of human desires and expectations, especially the expectations of such people as had foolish notions of happiness in a world where the solemn time that was coming was the only authorized expectation, the only right and reasonable subject for consideration.

It was no doubt the sight of my happy face passing and repassing on the street, which had moved him to attend to this duty, and he was more than usually successful in effecting his object, for a strange benumbing chill, like a premonition of approaching sorrow, fell upon me as I listened. I thrust it aside with scorn, and declared to myself proudly that, whatever else



of folly was in my composition, there was n't a trace of the superstitious taint. Let us not be too ready to reckon our finer perceptions among the superstitions, however.

That day, Marion seemed to wrap her sombre little mother about with a more constant devotion, if possible, as if to atone for the day in which she had lived without her.

In the evening we were to go to the "real good time" at Dr. Godwin's ; but Marion begged earnestly to be excused. The doctor seemed to have had his fears of that, and stopped on his way to somewhere — wearing an extremely fresh and becoming new summer suit, and his most imperial and authoritative manner — to say that we were not to betray him. He had promised for us, and he should regard it as a personal unkindness if we allowed his word to fail. Morris promised to pass the early part of the evening with Mrs. Kenneth, until she was ready to sleep, and somehow, although Marion was resolved not to go, she went.

It was to be nothing at all formal, — only the coming together of twenty or thirty young people, to pass an evening as it should happen, — and yet it demanded a cool, pretty toilet. This Marion offered as the insuperable difficulty.

"One cannot go out of an evening without an evening toilet," she said. "I have no evening

toilet. Therefore I cannot go out. I never did in my life. You see it is impossible." She dropped her outspread hands at her sides with gentle emphasis, to indicate that the question was settled.

For my part, I had lain awake the night before to think this matter over, and was prepared with a remedy for the difficulty.

"That best blue gown of yours is sheer and soft and pretty. I see an evening costume of the same material," I said, shutting my eyes as if fixing my inward gaze upon a vision.

"To be of much service, it would be necessary that I should see it, too."

"And so you shall, if you will give me some small pieces, and let me have the whole for a few hours. It shall not be harmed."

I was allowed that liberty, and at four o'clock called Marion to my room to try on her evening toilet.

"*Is that my dress?*" she exclaimed, when she saw it laid out on the bed.

"The same."

She looked aghast, as if seeing herself brought to utter ruin, but I showed her that I had only ripped the shoulder seams and turned the neck away, and finished it with some exquisite lace, bequeathed to me by the old lady for whom I was named. The little sleeves were chiefly of

the lace ; the front of the waist to be nearly covered by a large drooping cluster of Bon Siléne rosebuds ; the belt of the skirt to go outside the basque, and be concealed by a blue silk belt, fastened by a curious, dainty, old silver buckle, set with brilliants, — another of the bequests which had come to console me for my name. That was all. The work of hardly more than an hour. But the effect was marvelous.

She blushed when she saw herself in this costume, — alarmed at the thought of appearing in what she called “that uncovered condition.”

“Well, but don’t you see, this *must not* be the same thing you wore to the regatta !”

This law I pronounced with a gesture and tone which meant that the duty it involved was a plain one. “Moreover, as it was, it would be queer for a warm evening. But *voilà la différence !* Can we endure to be queer ? different from anybody else ? That is the test of endurance.”

“Oh, what I can endure it is n’t for me to say. I am a sheep in the hands of the shearer,” she answered, accepting my last twitches and touches patiently.

That was a cruelly unconsidered speech of mine. I had forgotten for the moment that she was queer, so I added, —

“But you *are* different from anybody else,

after all. You are more beautiful," and I moved back, looking at her with admiration.

"Am I?" she asked quickly, turning to the mirror again, and looking into it with studious gravity. "Do you think, if I had had a father, he could have said, 'This is my daughter' with satisfaction?"

"He could have said it with rapture," I replied.

"Now you make me glad!" she cried, turning upon me a face which glowed with a rapture of its own. "I try to be what my ideal father would love. My real father may be — may have been — unworthy. I'm afraid — I'm *afraid* of it, Rebecca; but I have an ideal, that is what the real one might have been, and I have a beautiful life with him."

To recall the sight she was in her really pretty costume! Her slender arms and graceful neck, as pure as Carrara, her cheeks feverishly bright, and her eyes lifted bashfully, from a sense of the strangeness of her new condition!

Mrs. Kenneth, when she saw this, arose with a smothered ejaculation.

"Am I wrong, then?" pleaded Marion timidly, drawing back.

"God knows what is wrong!" Mrs. Kenneth responded, sinking back upon her couch, and gazing upon her child in a bewildered way, as

at some unreal appearance. "God only knows what is wrong! I thought I saw my own self!"

"There is nothing wrong then, darling, — nothing in all the world unless, perhaps, that I should be flattered; made to think I could ever be like my beautiful mother," said Marion, kneeling beside her mother's couch. "I really don't want to go, dear," she added, laying her flushed cheek beside the pale one.

"Why not?" Mrs. Kenneth demanded with sudden vehemence. "Is it getting to be supposed that I must be watched over? You will go, if you please, and I will have nobody with me, — *nobody!*"

To my surprise, out of the sombre shadows of her eyes, there leaped a strange gleam.

No response came from Marion. She went, as I have said. If, indeed, anything more had been needed to bring her to yield, it was furnished by the appearance of Dr. Godwin, professing to be on his way home from a visit to a patient. He dropped in, in passing, he said, to make sure of his prey. He was as speechless with admiration as a boy, at the sight of Marion, and kindly gave me — in my old muslin, which Columbia had ironed and fluted — a look of smiling approval. He waited to be our convoy, chatting meantime with aunt Maria, and scoffing at Morris, whom we met coming in as we went



out, for allowing himself to be supplanted by the ancients; but Morris replied that it was exactly the immortals whom he feared.

As we went up the avenue to the dear old slate-colored house, we heard the lively murmur of many voices — the sound as of a happy waterfall hurrying down a precipice, and roulades upon the piano. Then the piano and several male voices burst into Schubert's "Lachen und Weinen." Mrs. Godwin, with a few other mammas and grandmammas, and some papas, were on the piazza, sitting in the light from the windows, and while we were paying our respects to her, we could see that some of the livelier lads and lasses were dancing to the air the rest were singing, — Jessie Putnam among the rest. She broke from the dance to come and welcome us, — that is how informal it all was, — and then we were plunged gently in.

But the memory of that evening, as a whole is vague, like the memory of irrelevant things that merely pass by, while one of its incidents affected my life, and can never be forgotten.

I only recall that there was one long frolic; a deal of blind effort to restore the missing tail to the donkey on the wall; a deal of shouting at the results; a few impromptu charades, so absurd that those who laughed easily fell into convulsions and gasped between their struggles

that they *should* die! that one young man played the piano, and another the violin, remarkably well; that another, with an old hat, a large parti-colored handkerchief, the wreck of an old umbrella, and a table that he was at liberty to pound with all the stress of his convictions, made a negro stump speech, which was even more dangerous to life than the charades; that there was a series of clever impersonations by the funny man of his class at Harvard; and that mixed with all, like sugar and spice, there were undisguised little flirtations, and the more or less earnest manifestation of "nothing half so sweet in life." The elders looked in through the open windows, as spectators, the doctor throwing in an effective remark from time to time. He declared that we needed to be more than eighteen to realize how warm we were making ourselves.

At length, in a lull of the *tourbillon*, Jessie Putnam called out some of her tall cousins, whom she presently marshaled in again bringing baskets and boxes containing accumulations of the millinery of the past; a basket of ribbons and laces; a box of feathers and flowers; lavish supplies of silk and crêpe and tulle odds and ends, with piles of needles and thread and pins; and last of all a big pile of girls' hats, of various colors and styles.

The silence of wonder settled upon the lookers-on, while these things were having their entrance and disposition, under advantage of which Jessie began, with a bewitching mock *révérence* and gesture, "My lords and gentlemen: This is the stuff that girls' hats are made of!"

One of the young fellows who were sitting round Marion rose with solemnity, and made a low obeisance, in recognition of the presentation, whereupon the remainder of those who were seated rose too, while those who were standing rectified their careless attitudes, and all, as with one impulse, bowed low and repeatedly.

"We hope you will bow with as good grace to a little favor we have to ask of you," continued Jessie.

"Ah! ah! Heah! heah!" came fervently from all her male auditors, as if they were fairly running over with willingness and delight.

"We are frequently told," Jessie began again, with a sigh, — a heavy sigh, — "that there are no milliners to compare with men-milliners; but here are one, two, three, four, um, um, um, um, — fourteen girls, who have never known the rapture of owning a hat made by a man-milliner, — unless — oh, excuse me! — unless Miss Kenneth and Miss Parmalee" —

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, never!" Miss Kenneth and Miss Parmalee exclaimed.

“Well, then,” Jessie resumed with assurance, “here are fourteen girls who want to give you the pleasure of gratifying their dearest wish. We want you to choose your materials, and trim a hat, with which to crown the girl you mean to take out to supper. This lovely souvenir of Sorrento [a little inlaid easel] is for the man whose good taste produces the prettiest and most becoming result; and this [a common clay pipe, gaudily painted and tied with ribbons] is for the one who succeeds in producing the most perfect failure.”

This proposition was received with a diversity of caprice; with groans of despair by the incompetent; with the mincing airs of stylish milliners by those who were altogether pleased with their incompetence, or who suspected themselves of gifts; with a reckless abandon of themselves to any decree of Jessie, by Jessie’s most ardent admirers.

There were anxious faces; woe-begone and hopeless faces; waggish and wicked faces; faces full of delighted interest and intention, — full of mischief and merriment, — that bent over the baskets and boxes; and a dubious rummaging, hasty color-blind choosing, repenting and re-choosing; boyish ejaculations and laughter; and a rapturous appreciation of the scene on the part of the girls. A handsome young athlete,

with flashing black eyes and rich Spanish complexion, humbled himself before Jessie, and entreated to be let off until next year, swearing to go and learn the trade.

"Oh, no," Jessie responded sweetly. "We shall be *perfectly* satisfied with your native gifts. *Unworthy?* Dear me! Anything we want is worthy of us, is n't it?"

At that moment, she discovered Morris looking in at one of the windows from the piazza, with an appearance of mild, good-natured interest, and imperatively called him to come and dress up a hat for the girl he meant to take to supper.

"By all means," said Morris, "but where is the girl for me? There are n't enough to go round."

"Then you must be quick and secure one," said Jessie. "Those who are not must wear their hats themselves."

Morris came leisurely in, and smilingly looked over the stock, — which was getting rather reduced, — as if he enjoyed the undertaking.

"There! That's the way I like to see a man begin his work," said Jessie; "as if he did n't scorn his occupation."

"Scorn it?" said Morris gallantly, but in his ever-tranquil way. "Let him only think for whom he is working!"



The elder girls began at once to prim themselves and give pinkish touches to their frizzes and furbelows, and their frolic abandon subsided into an earnest desire to be interesting, for the young doctor was the ideal man to many of them, and it was not often that they had the opportunity to make themselves interesting to him.

I watched him with pride and exquisite pleasure. "And yet, they say it is entirely subjective, — that there is nothing outside of ourselves to account for this delightful sensation and appearance of things," I remarked to myself, with a curl of the lips for those materialists who seemed to me to take basely limited views of things, not even excepting the grounds and reasons of love.

But you might have said he was too mild, slow, lacking in intensity; such is the peculiarity of opinion that some do say that. To me, however, his mildness and moderation were among his chief charms.

I am sure he never thought to make himself one of those cloying creatures "a fascinating man," but he made the commonest deeds delightful by his mode of doing them, and the accident befell him to be sometimes accredited with intention. It was the desire to give pleasure, and not the effort to be pleasing, which was his characteristic, however. Yet, to be sure, it is I

who say so, while "that which is truly and indeed characteristic of the man is known only to God." A purpose to please for the sake of being pleased may lurk in the most self-forgetful nature, if it be human nature, I suppose.

In making his selections, Morris appeared to touch everything with the decision of purpose. He had an artist's taste in colors, and was accustomed to the delicate handling of instrument and material. This was comparatively coarse work to him. While the younger fellows attracted attention by their delightful awkwardness, or their dramatic gifts, I — with some others — watched Morris select a black chip hat, faced with velvet, and a scarf of dull red crêpe, which he carefully matched in flowers, choosing a bunch of poppies, — my own colors. Then, with a paper of pins, he seated himself on the piano-bench, and while his rivals were struggling to thread their needles, or make one more jest, twisted the scarf gracefully about the hat, stuck a pin here and there, and fastened the ends by pinning the bunch of poppies on one side. In five minutes the deed was accomplished. I turned away my eyes, and was occupied in a general survey of the room, feeling as if my expectations must be plainly written on my face, into which a quick-beating heart sent the blood leaping. Marion stood just behind me, with her

elbow resting on a corner of the *étagère*, at right angles with the piano, shading her eyes with her hand, apparently from the gaslight, and looking with an intensely mournful expression — at what? I wondered.

The elderly people had all come inside, and Jessie Putnam was wandering about from artist to artist, watching the progress of their work, hanging with familiar fondness upon her father's arm. It was this — it was Jessie — that Marion was considering. But the sight of her was little calculated to awaken melancholy, it seemed to me.

Cousin Morris rose with a leisurely, casual air, and stood for a moment with his hat on one extended hand, criticising or approving it. Then he turned his eyes, — what influence determined their direction? — turned them directly towards that shaded face, of which only the tender mouth was revealed, with its corners drooping into lines of grief. It might have been some touch of pity, or of sudden penitence, that moved him then. The ease with which his heart responded to such touches was almost like a weakness. As if he had had no other thought or intention, however, he took two deliberate steps, and placed the hat on Marion's head. She turned her face up with an involuntary start of surprise, and Morris, looking down upon it, stood as if transfixed, his

own look one of wonder, too, — for there — there it was! that "something with a tear in it," something dark, soft, wistful, exquisitely fringed, and as full of trouble as even he, in his most exacting moments, could have prescribed.

Neither of them could have known how long they stood so, gazing with mutual wonder at each other, but the spell was broken by cries of admiration.

"Oh!"

"How *lovely*!"

"And stylish!"

"What an air he has given it!"

"Yet it is n't altogether becoming," said Jessie Putnam with a judicial frown, and a pretty twist of her little brown neck. "Those are not her colors."

"I'm sure she is *beau-tiful* in them," cried an opposing voice.

"Of course; what else? But he ought to have chosen that white hat, and this cream-white scarf, and those tea-roses. That would have been exalted perfection. There is not a girl in the room dark enough to wear that peculiar red, and be improved by it, except Miss Parmalee."

By this time, I had been crowned by the funny Cantabrigian with a dreadful poke, and one stiff quill stuck in its straight band. The originator of this *œuvre* challenged criticism, declar-

ing that simplicity was his ideal in a young girl's attire. He did not presume to gild refined gold, nor paint the lily, but — he appealed to connoisseurs — had he not touched the highest point of chasteness in style?

As all eyes were turned upon me, I was obliged to lend myself with as good grace as possible to the sport, and assumed the air of a demure damsel, with downcast eyes and simpering smile, of a simplicity equal to that of the hat. The *tout ensemble* was greeted with shouts of laughter, and the booby prize was awarded to my milliner.

In spite of Jessie Putnam's objections, there was no hat which could compare with Miss Kenneth's for beauty and becomingness. It might have been more becoming, but as she was one of the fortunate ones who could wear almost anything with impunity, it was declared by the majority to be perfection, and cousin Morris won the souvenir of Sorrento.

We were a grotesque procession; the girls with the hats of their men-milliners, and some of the milliners wearing their own marvelous creations. Cousin Morris looked at his achievement a good deal, looked with a studious gravity, while I vied with the funny man of Harvard in fantastic folly. The loudest and most prolonged peals of laughter came from our corner of the supper-



room, to which Dr. Godwin gravitated by a sort of natural selection, vowing that Voltaire's device to drive away *ennui* could n't hold a candle to that *vaudeville* of his.

So we caroused until midnight, and went home. The funny man came with me, and Morris and Marion were left to themselves. The old moon was rising, — the dull, sallow moon of an August night, — and the quiet streets seemed full of a sinister gloom. How hideous my merriment seemed to me, marring that midnight silence !

## CHAPTER X.

### BREAKFAST IN DUO AND TRIO.

WHOEVER has owned a balky horse, that neither coaxing nor goading could set a-going, but which, when the demon within him was itself ready to go, would bolt into a rattling race, to end — the demon knew where, can have some faint, but only faint conception of the dreadful times aunt Maria had with her circulation. After it had been coaxed with the flesh-brush and the massage treatment, lashed with digitalis, and sworn at with capsicum and veratrum until it was fairly roused, it would give a terrible plunge, and aunt Maria must then helplessly wait for it to have its gallop out.

This she was doing, laid up in her room, the next morning. Mrs. Kenneth only came down to dinner, and cousin Morris had been called out early, so that Marion and I were left again at breakfast, as on the morning when we had had our first chat.

These opportunities were not frequent. Though we lived under the same roof, we

seldom had prolonged intercourse. It required an infinite amount of attention to keep aunt Maria up to her standard of cheerfulness, yet, in my own judgment, that was an exceedingly low one indeed, on the whole. Miss Kenneth took the slow morning walk and the long afternoon drive, daily, with her mother, and in other ways had her attention even more exclusively directed to its chief object than mine was to aunt Maria.

"Well," I said, sinking into my chair, as into a refuge, "let us consider, and see what we have left of ourselves, now the giddy whirl is over."

"Oh, you gay creature!" Marion responded. "You sparkling top-bubble! You made me feel like an old mummy that had been dug up, and found not to be worth while."

"I feel like that, this morning. I was dug up at half past three, and it did n't seem worth while."

"Poor thing! you had hardly been asleep."

"Oh, asleep! I had n't been sleepy, but I was just going to be, as I'm always just about to accomplish something. Did you enjoy the fandango?"

"It was important to me, — my last appearance."

"Your last? Do you mean to renounce the world?"

“It would renounce me, if I did n’t. I felt — to express my feelings once more — like a dutiable article that would not pass the customs.”

“How do you mean?”

“Do you think I did n’t hear you asked to explain me, — who I was, and what I was, — and see your struggle to get me through with credit?”

I was silent under the embarrassment of this unexpected truth.

“These things, I suppose — I am sure you must think — ought to have been made plain in the beginning.”

“Oh, no, if you don’t wish” —

“But I do wish, — I *do* wish! Heaven knows I wish!” she exclaimed passionately, with a movement as of a bound creature lifting and dropping its shackles. “We were received with confidence; you would say we ought to have returned trust with trust. You must think we are outrageous.”

“Oh, no! no indeed!”

“But I wish you would believe that you know as much about me as I know about myself; — that if I could I would tell you more. That will be some excuse.”

“But I know nothing, — absolutely *nothing*!” This I said mutely, by a stare of undisguised amazement, which was, however, equal to a shout.

"I know nothing — *nothing*," she responded. "What you see is all that has ever been since I can remember. Mamma and myself — nothing more — we two, escaping from place to place continually."

"*Escaping?*"

"No place is safe. Why? I'm sorry I cannot tell you. I don't know. We shall probably fly from here some day, and when we are gone, *don't* think we were monsters! I can't speak about these things to mamma, it makes her very wretched to have me mention them, so I do not insist; and that is why I do not understand. I have lived as near to my mother as her own heart, always — always — every day and every hour, near enough to know how pure and good she is, and yet — I know nothing more. Perhaps I am wrong to speak, but I felt last night that I *must* say something. I have never opened my lips before."

"But may I ask what the danger seems to be?"

"That is a question mamma alone can answer."

"Is it something she fears for you, or herself, or for both?"

"Ah, if I only knew!"

I leaned back in my chair, to take a long studious look at this girl with the fine, transpar-



ent face, the flitting color and flashing eyes; a girl full of spirit and energy, who had endured such a life of submission and deprivation; a girl all truth and frankness, who lived in perpetual disguise, even to her own self. In a certain sense she had lived alone, as well as in the dark. With some unknown, dreaded thing pursuing, she had gone singing and smiling all the way. Speaking my thought aloud, I declared that she was gifted with supernatural power.

“Well — perhaps,” she answered simply.

On every succeeding morning of aunt Maria’s absence, cousin Morris was there to breakfast with us.

It was impossible, since the day of the regatta and the evening of the revel, not to be impressed by a change, not only in Miss Kenneth herself, but in the atmosphere of the house, which she had so enlivened by her presence. Her spirits had come to be reserved and economized for her mother. When Mrs. Kenneth was out of the scene, there was a silence in the air, like that of those late August mornings, when the summer was going, and the birds had ceased to sing.

I noticed that her own singing became low and soft when she was, or thought she was, quite by herself, and that it had a comforting tone, though set in a plaintive key. It seemed to me

at those times that she was giving a little comfort to herself.

Cousin Morris, having opened his eyes, appeared to observe everything. I saw his old indifference falling far behind a new and increasing interest. Miss Kenneth, with some occasion for a tear, was quite another person from Miss Kenneth who could show no good reason for much laughter, in season and out of season. I was conscious of a desire to be afflicted myself.

There seemed to be in my cousin an occasional intention to bring Miss Kenneth to look up, — to look at him, — as if he craved another sight into those depths where he had seen that startling tear. This did not surprise me. Neither did the increased gentleness of his manner towards her. His manner with women was always gentle, even to tenderness, for he “seemed always to have present in his imagination the weakness of their frames.” This kindliness of bearing was never at all affected by the faults he discovered in them, and though the scene at Mrs. Dodge’s had offended his fine taste, his heart was better and finer than his taste, and was now apparently furnished with this nebulous interest, somewhat attenuated as yet, perhaps, but ready to close together and ensphere itself into a world of cherishing solicitude. A lively poetic imagination was ready to help evolve ex-

treme conditions. Some men, with such an imagination, would have composed lyrics ; but Morris, no doubt, lacked that certain degree of heat at which, as somebody has said, language fuses, and becomes the possible vehicle of poetic feeling ; so he only produced, at this period of his life, some chapters of prose, of which it is left to me to do the writing.

One morning, Miss Kenneth having finished her breakfast expeditiously and departed, Morris drew out his visiting book, looked over his list, made a few memoranda, and then, instead of hastening away as usual, sat sketching idly on an old envelope, as if he had forgotten to go, while I was waiting politely for him to do so, before leaving the table myself. He presently fixed serious eyes upon Miss Kenneth's vacant place, rapping the table softly with the top of his pencil, in a most aimless and useless fashion.

"Is my prayer answered?" I asked. "Has remorse arrived?"

He turned his face to me without dismissing the slight frown which had fallen upon it, and seemed at once to understand.

"I don't know exactly what to call it, Rebecca," he answered. "That I was probably weak of understanding and hard of heart, I cordially allow with deep regret, but there's a good deal that is n't so clear as that."

“What, for instance?”

“Why, look at the complexity of a nature that laughs with abandon in the face of death, and is overcome with grief in the midst of a carnival! A problem that I can’t solve always haunts me.”

“It might be partly explained by” —

But Morris held up his hand in protest. “*Don’t* explain it! Please!” he entreated. “I always hate to have a puzzle shown me. I like to study it out.”

I smiled at the supposed jest; but, indeed, there was no smiling, no jesting, on the part of Morris Beverley. He looked as serious as he might have done over a case of his own especial disease, not very clearly expressed in the symptoms, and after giving a few more touches to his apparently unconscious sketch, pocketed his notebook and went his way, not forgetting, however, to lay his hand gently on my head in passing, saying, “Good-by, little Rebecca.”

The next morning, when we came in to breakfast, Morris had already arrived, and was engaged in finishing the last pages of a notable new novel. The volume was one Marion had brought, finished reading, and left with me, since when it had remained a consignment to the library table, where I could stop and snatch a page or two in my goings and comings, and

where Morris had picked it up, out of curiosity, as a stranger in his territory.

"Well," I exclaimed, arrested by the sight, "here is my cousin applying his mind to what he calls the 'waste material of literature!'"

"This is n't much of a waste," he returned, laying the book aside and coming over to his place at the table. "The movement of a great feeling, which could lead to such self-devotion, is quite a different matter from the detestable acquisitiveness which is the usual theme. It does n't interest me to watch a man sighing for, grasping at, and at length seizing upon the object which he considers most essential to his delight in life, but *this*" —

Marion was arranging some flowers, that were Absalom's devout offering to her every morning, while I poured the cocoa. Morris reached over and helped himself to a sprig of mignonette, which he stuck in his buttonhole.

"There is no response to my modest remark," he said then, looking impartially at each of his auditors. "Somebody must have read the book."

"Miss Kenneth is the only one," I explained.

"Oh, — then tell me something you thought about it, Miss Kenneth, if you can without spoiling the pleasure of it for Rebecca."

"You need n't mind me," said I; "I'm apt



to look ahead in my reading, at any rate, and I don't know as I shall finish this book. I declare, if it were my best and dearest friend, I don't care to know so exactly how and why she puts an extra pin into her gown, and when I'm very much agitated over the sorrow of a heroine about to part — it may be for years and it may be forever — with all she holds dear on earth, I don't like to have to stop and consider that somewhere in the neighborhood of the wharf from which she is embarking an East Boston woman is whipping her naughty boy. It divides my sympathies too much."

Morris smiled indulgently at this, saying that I was only a little girl, and that my taste would improve with years, it was to be hoped.

Yet Marion's opinion appeared to be of consequence, and was watched for with interest.

"It seems to me that the exact disposition a man wishes to make of himself cannot be counted a sacrifice at all," she said.

But Morris differed. There were willing sacrifices, — glad sacrifices ; lives painfully, though heartily, surrendered. Marion thought it would be intolerable to be the object for whom such a surrender was made, and "Oh, why?" Morris wanted to know.

Having once suffered the conversation which followed, it will be impossible to repeat it. Let

it be sufficient to say that they went into an exhaustive discussion of self-devotion ; of what constituted sacrifice ; of whether the quality of self-sacrifice, like the merit of a good deed, did not "evaporate with the first profit derived from it."

The matter of sacrifice was looked at under all lights and from every possible standpoint, it seemed to me. As far as I could make out, Morris desired to immolate himself very much indeed, and Marion finished by saying that she could imagine it far more difficult to accept a sacrifice than to make one.

I could not at all see how we got into such deep water. At the end of my patience, I said, "I, for one, would n't feel overburdened with the debt, if you offered up some part of the chicken to me, cousin Morris," for while they had been going on, the nicely browned, broiled chicken had been cooling on the platter.

Morris started, looked to see what was before him, and begged to be forgiven.

"Let us not speak of sacrificing any more," I entreated. "I don't want to see anybody laid on the altar, but while you are talking, I seem to see the fires ascending."

"Our festive Rebecca must have the flags a-flying, the bells a-ringing, and the band a-playing all the time," said cousin Morris, smiling across at me.

“Yes, that is what I like better than whole burnt-offerings,” I replied; “so I shall not read the sacrificial book, after all. I had no idea things were to turn out so unpleasantly.”

And strangely, though unreasonably enough, I felt a strong aversion to the notable novel, and never looked into it again.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TEA AND AFTER TEA WITH MERAB.

ON Friday evening, Merab had her best room open, which made the tea to which we had been invited seem a grave occasion, and I involuntarily spoke in the low tone appropriate to solemn situations, when we were ushered into it by Hannah Shaw, Merab's one retainer, a woman of about her own age, who had been brought up to the service of the house by Merab's mother. All this, to me, accustomed to running in at the side door, seemed quite awful, — this ringing and waiting at the front portal for Hannah, in her starchiest array, to turn it slowly back on its hinges, and show us to our fit places in the blanched looking room, that had been Merab's mother's parlor, seldom opened, probably, except at Quarterly Meeting times. The paper on the walls was so pale, the paint such a chalky white, the shades the same colorless negation, and the very carpet, that ought to have given us the sense of a ground beneath us, made us seem to be hovering above a pale, dun-colored mist,

through which a shower of white rose leaves was scattering. Just the place for spectres to feel at home in. But for one who wanted to cling to solid earth, there were, after all, a couple of spots that looked real and substantial, where he might take his stand, for among the things Merab's Philadelphia relatives had sent her were a couple of Turkish rugs, and these she had wisely laid out on this floor. Their sober, softly-blended hues did not quarrel with the old things, nor quench them, but, like amiable, rich relations, had the air of being at home with their poor connections.

Perhaps it has not been mentioned that Mrs. Kenneth had a queer little trick, after she entered a door, of turning to look behind it, or of strolling about a room in an apparently absent way, and taking a casual peep back of anything which formed a screen. She was extremely nervous, and had various little terrors of the dog, of the cat, of sudden noises, of almost anything, and I fancied she was uneasy lest Rip or Sally might be lurking in these nooks at our house, but I perceived that upon entering this room she followed the same custom, and glanced in a furtive way behind Merab's parlor door.

We had scarcely crossed the threshold, when Merab herself came in from some more cheerful



and accustomed region, offering a cordial hand and a sedate smile, and I think we all felt better at once. We each tried to say something, at any rate, when our voices had a hollow, unnatural sound. Mrs. Kenneth, I thought, seemed a trifle depressed by her surroundings, especially when we sat down, all four of us, with our hands folded just alike in our laps, feeling, perhaps, that anything life-like would be out of place.

The difficulty of prolonged and repeated conversation with people who were almost impersonal in their indefiniteness, pressed with some severity upon Merab, too, I fancied, until Hannah Shaw, as a relief committee, opened the dining-room door, and announced that tea was ready.

When Merab's mother had asked company to tea, her table must have assumed the same guise, and offered much the same invitation and contribution to the appetites of her guests that Merab's did. There was, to begin with, the same old English china, the same chunky, fluted silver sugar bowl and cream pitcher and tea-pot. Not a good-for-nothing lay figure of a teapot, that would stand and wait for its humbler and worthier deputy to do the steeping, but a good honest fellow, that could endure the fire himself, and offer you the undissipated aroma of Merab's fine Orange Pekoe. And there, probably, was

the same pattern of well-rounded-up biscuits ; raised cake, cup cake, and Yearly Meeting cake, made from the same recipes that Rhoda Austen had used, fifty years ago ; and cut-up peaches from a descendant of the old lyre-shaped peach-tree that Merab had planted when she was a little girl, in a sunny, sheltered corner of the garden, where the climate was always mild.

That seed, when it had been laid in the ground, represented one hidden hope, which had since ripened into fruition many times. There are few of us, after all, who enjoy the perfect fulfillment of even one hope, with the addition of lavish sugar and cream.

Mrs. Kenneth looked at the quaintly exquisite array before she sat down, and when she took her cup of tea, looked especially at that, as she placed it beside her, slowly, gently, with a tender shadow of a smile ; and then her thin white fingers toyed in a caressing way with the old-fashioned, slender, pointed teaspoon.

"No doubt thee's thinking of thy grandmother," said Merab.

"Ah," responded Mrs. Kenneth, with a sigh, "*I had* a grandmother !"

Miss Kenneth looked up eagerly, at this announcement, as if that were delightful news indeed, and I hoped it would be followed by further disclosures, but Mrs. Kenneth reverted to

old china, as distinct from grandmothers, and was too deeply interested in making out whether Merab's was Chelsea ware to let us know, what would have been of far more interest to us, of what particular ware that grandmother of hers had been. With real cunning, it seemed to me, she evaded the subject of forbears. She spoke with feeling of the charm of dainty housekeeping, and assumed that Merab's life was one of ideal peace and contentment.

"Thee's indebted to thy imagination for that impression," said Merab. "Rebecca will tell thee that I complain a good deal."

"Some benevolent, worthy person, who would let Friend Merab lay herself out, and be something of a slave to them, could put an end to that," I said.

"Rebecca, how thee talks !"

"Is n't it true, that if somebody — or several bodies — would allow you to take all the responsibility of life off their shoulders, you would be perfectly delighted ?"

"It is true," said Merab, "that we want those in our homes that we can think about, and do for, — we women folks. It's a kind of selfishness, I expect."

"It's *your* kind, dear ; the only kind you know anything about," I said.

"It would n't do for this to be generally

known," Miss Kenneth declared. "People would swarm upon Friend Merab at the sound of it. Would n't they, mamma?"

"Ah, I should think so!" sighed Mrs. Kenneth.

"Just as things came swarming to Amphion, at the sound of his lyre," I put in, for at seventeen I liked to make the most of what I knew.

"Does thee think so?" asked Merab, with naïve surprise, looking from Marion to me. She feared she was far too old and dull to be tolerated, and her pleasure at this encouraging view was childlike in its believing frankness. Though she had n't the least notion who Amphion was, she grasped the idea of a swarm of people to do for, with uncommon intelligence.

"I'm perfectly sure of it," said Miss Kenneth with emphasis, and Merab returned thanks for the assurance with a radiant smile.

Just then, Hannah Shaw presented herself, and a tray sparkling with exquisite old cut-glass cups, containing calf's-foot jelly — translucent amber morsels under caps of snow.

I think we all felt that, in common justice, those lovely cups ought to be welcomed with a little eulogy, and Merab responded to our praise that there had been twenty-four belonging to her grandmother, and the same twenty-four she herself possessed at that moment.

"There were twenty-four of everything, and there's not a piece gone or cracked. I tell Hannah Shaw, if she's inclined to break any china or glass, she may indulge her inclination on the centennial things!"

"These must be centennial things," said Mrs. Kenneth, indicating the whole array of china, glass, and silver.

"I mean the new centennial things, that came from the exhibition at Philadelphia," said Merab.

"Would you let us see those, after tea, Friend Merab?" I asked. This was a resource. The centennial exposition would afford a topic of conversation. It could be discussed *ad infinitum*, with the most indefinite people, as a universal matter. Merab herself had seen it, having been coaxed down to Philadelphia for a visit while it was open, and I delighted in the awed look and tone with which she always mentioned her experience as a witness of its wonders. There, for the first time in her life, she had encountered emotions in diversity. She had been dazzled, amazed, filled with a timorous delight; she had even felt guilty and ashamed. All the kingdoms of the earth — or the glories of them — spread out before her, made her feel as if Satan, who has these things at his disposal (so the Bible told her), must himself directly appear;



and when she had come face to face with some of the fine arts, she had been quite overcome with the certainty that he was indeed there on the spot. She had not ventured to ask even her own sisters the awful wherefores of some incredible things. The bare facts were more than she could have expected to see divulged.

The reflex of all these sensations, as they played upon Merab's dear, candid face again, in rehearsal, was charming to behold. A countless troop of friends, some of them possessed of a good many unobtrusive shekels, had each made her a gift of something bought in the great bazaars, and when these, with the additions of former offerings, had been set forth, it was no mean exposition in itself.

After tea they all came out to the light, — all except one, — and that was never mentioned. It came from the fashionable New York girl, to whom one of her nephews was engaged. Without considering the difference between Merab's taste and that of Madame de Pompadour, she had given her a gorgeous Sèvres cup and saucer of the florid Louis XV. style, — amourettes hanging festoons of flowers and tying them with true lovers' knots around a mythologic subject. This distressing thing Merab kept covered with a napkin in the remotest corner of a deep, dark cupboard, that Diana might bathe in uninterrupted seclusion.

When Merab opened the doors and began to set her treasures forth, odors of sandal-wood, attar of roses, musk, and "tropical odors sweeter than musk" came out with them, and excited poetry and dreams. It seemed as if dear Merab was a little excited and dreamy herself. Her face had a delighted expression, — and let me tell a secret. She liked these sorts of things in an extraordinary way, and those to whom she had given her life had guessed it, and feeling, some a tender gratitude and some compassion towards the gentle creature, who had been always destitute of indulgences, lavished these baubles upon her with the intention that she should have enough of them at last. But it is n't quite the same matter, I suppose, to have the things you always would have liked poured down in a heap in the last moments, just as you are thinking of starting on an eternal journey, where you cannot take them, and where they might not be of much use if you could. Yet I suspect that Merab enjoyed, when she was alone, taking out her strange possessions, and feasting her long-starved love of beauty.

"But where is the old Holland jar I like so much?" I asked. "I hope Hannah Shaw has n't wreaked her suppressed destructiveness upon that?"

"I use it for a flower-pot," said Merab; "it's in the greenhouse."

“That’s something else I hope we may see — the greenhouse,” I said.

Merab did not reply that there was not much to see — that her plants were not doing very well just then, having recently returned from their summer out of doors, and suffering a little from the change. Her plants were her pride, her one unalloyed delight, and she was too truthful to disguise the gladness with which she exhibited them. Nobody else had such success with these things as Merab, and she knew it. Everything flourished at the touch of her hand which withered under other people’s most careful solicitude.

We were obliged to pass through Hannah Shaw’s shining realm, on our way to the little conservatory. Hannah was by no means loath. for so universal is human vanity, that kitchens as well as kingdoms have their vaunted splendors, and the glittering towers and hanging gardens of Babylon were no more to Amyitis and Semiramis than Hannah’s highly polished boards and metals, and her own flower-pots in the kitchen windows, were to Hannah. That they should never have been displayed would have seemed like hiding her candle under a bushel, if it be fit to compare so much lustre to one small candle.

At the farther end of this demesne a door

opened into the little greenery which Hannah had illuminated for the occasion with a row of lamps. It was a bower of sweetness, of purity and freshness, an infinitesimal point of perfection in a world where perfection is falsely supposed to be impossible. Some of Merab's ancestors would have counted it a folly — probably a sinful indulgence — when they were trammelled by the chance opinions of this life ; but if they could have looked in through the little glass roof, as the stars did, and seen the pure delight of that patient, innocent soul in this small vantage-ground, where she and nature triumphed together, they might, if they had been passing some time in heaven, have recognized the scene as “ liker heaven than earth.”

We had small opportunity to consider its particulars, however, at the beginning of our visit, for Mrs. Kenneth had barely crossed the threshold, when she paused, apparently arrested by some shock, turned from side to side, sniffing the air, and ejaculating low, unintelligible words. Presently, with one swift impulse, she was upon her knees in a corner, where a vine of southern jasmine climbed to the roof, and hung its golden trumpets all along the sunniest side. The air was full of its evening incense, which even the luxuriant heliotrope could not overpower. Pressing the flowers to her lips, to her bosom, the

reticent, apathetic little woman directly fell to sobbing, like a sorry child. Miss Kenneth, in another instant, was beside her mother, folding her in her arms, soothing, hushing her, as a mother might have soothed and comforted the sorry child.

"What is it? Tell me — tell me, darling!" she entreated. And we heard Mrs. Kenneth, between her sobs, say, "It grew — it grew all over" —

"Where did it grow, dear? Tell me! Tell me all about it! It grew all over what?"

This prayer sounded like the cry of hope out of a despairing heart.

But it was not answered. As if it had been a warning and a check to her, Mrs. Kenneth soon ceased weeping, put her daughter aside with much decision, and rising, begged us to pardon a childish recollection.

"Such recollections are precious. It is good for us to have them," said Merab.

But, evidently, Mrs. Kenneth thought otherwise. She dismissed the subject as expeditiously as possible, with the air of finding it unwelcome, and appeared to exert herself to dispel the impression it had made. While her manner toward her daughter was cool and reserved, it warmed and expanded in exception to that, so as to seem quite a strange phenomenon to me. It appeared



to entreat us to forget the past abandon, and to see how self-possessed she really was. She found the little greenhouse charming as a whole. She praised its thriftiness, its sweetness and luxuriance, its superb orchids and ferns ; asked for a rose, and made the feeling she showed for that a foil to her emotion over the jasmine.

We finished the evening before a cheery fire on the hearth, in the old family sitting-room, where Merab and I, at least, felt like our natural selves once more. Merab took her knitting-work, and the steady movement of her needles was an instigation to her tongue. The two forces seemed to operate upon each other, and together had the effect of bringing us all into ostensible confidence. The clear, open fire, too, was an incentive to frankness. When we arose to say good-night to Merab, we seemed to have chatted ourselves into a group of old acquaintances, so unconsciously familiar and cordial had our intercourse become, and yet, if we had considered, Merab and I would have been forced to allow that the Kenneths were as strange and unknown to us as ever.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MRS. LOVELL IN PURSUIT OF "MATERIAL."

AUNT MARIA'S town was hers only by conquest. She came from Rhode Island, took uncle Abram, and accepted his town as part of the spoils of victory. It was uncle Abram's native place ; the natural source of much that is forever lovely and of good report.

Here, the Puritans and Quakers had settled down in peace together, like the millennial lion and lamb. The Quaker leavening had been, perhaps, the more active element, for whatever was best in spirit and influence was so by its qualification. It was that which gave a certain quiet tone to the streets, a more decent air even to the political gatherings, which established a tradition of frugality and moderation in everything, from the measures of the mayor and the opinions of the press, to the colors and qualities of goods in the shop windows. There were large numbers among the inhabitants who, not being Quakers themselves, had inherited the calm Quaker blood, the steady-going Quaker

foot, that could never be taught to dance, except in a steady-going fashion, and the Quaker tongue, which would speak the plainest truths in the gentlest way.

Everybody was theoretically minding his own affairs, and serving some good cause, — some anti-something-or-other. For every bad cause on earth the little Quaker city had an anti-cause, and even before aunt Maria occupied it there was an immense determination towards rectitude in its moral tendencies. I know it has been called a wicked place, but that was probably by persons whose researches were in those directions. It had one indiscretion, exactly like that of some other little towns. It indulged a robust appetite for gossip, and it was really quite abandoned to an incontinent desire to know where people came from, who and what they came from, and what they had come for, when they landed on that shore ; and where they were going, how they were going, and why they were going, when they were ready to depart.

The Kenneths would, naturally, feed this steady glow to a living flame, especially after Miss Kenneth's introduction to social privileges. As unknown people, who did not define and elucidate themselves, they were open to suspicion.

Aunt Maria, herself outraged by the silence

of her guests, was not inclined to own it to outsiders, but supported the dignity of her house, of which she was peculiarly jealous, by pretending not to hear, when she was put under examination on their account, and in place of the expected answers offered misprized conjectures in regard to the weather. But cousin Morris could not so easily escape. Everywhere he was called upon to pay the tribute of an explanation for his guests, when he was absolutely destitute of the means. This I knew because he had asked me, with some appearance of anxiety, if Miss Kenneth had never said anything to me about her relatives and friends, — her father, for instance, — or mentioned the place in which her family tree was rooted. I was unable, of course, to give him any satisfaction, and his already profound desire to know deepened and deepened. And that fresh, eager inquisitiveness could not have been piqued by another object so altogether tantalizing and inciting as that to which his tardy perceptions were unfolding. It was partly the surprise which aroused him; expecting nothing, and finding so much; the specific pleasure of the unlooked-for.

"That accent of her mother's is Southern," was the settled point from which he never seemed to get on. But once he added, "However uncertain she may be in her antecedents, it is very certain what she is in herself."

“Who, Mrs. Kenneth?”

“No, it was Miss Kenneth of whom I was thinking.”

“Then you’ve solved your puzzle?”

“M — well, partly. It is n’t an easy one.”

“You mean she is still mysterious?”

“She has a great deal of character.”

“It is handsome in you to say that.”

“How — handsome?”

“I have heard you insist upon it that she had but little.”

“What I insist upon now is that I was a braying ass.”

Presently it began to seem probable that the supposition of something wrong in a former chapter of the Kenneths’ family history was the one touch wanted to culminate the expanding interest, for has it not been said that cousin Morris was born to set the social order right, and only waiting for the advent of occasion? A very pertinent occasion was a lovely, helpless, innocent girl, disestablished from the assured ground upon which she ought, by right of her loveliness and innocence, to be planted.

I fancy I can point at the very moment when he elected, with a glow of feeling, that she should be reinstated, safe and honored, raised to the level nature had allotted her. It was not difficult to conceive of a means by which she might



become entitled to stand before society's inquisitors, and say where she belonged, and to whom she belonged. It was not incredible that such a reformer should be in love with such a cause.

It was near Thanksgiving, and Mrs. Lovell had come to make her annual visit. She, as well as aunt Maria, had originated in Rhode Island, and was descended from King Philip, or Roger Williams, but one of her ancestors, on her mother's side, had burned some Quakers, in Plymouth Colony, and Mrs. Lovell had inherited his zeal, which took the diluted form in her of wishing always to know of new people, which side of the blaze they represented — the inside or the outside. She watched the Kenneths with the keen eye which had made the cold rill creep down my young spine.

"She's still at it," I said to myself, "putting people into books."

We had all come into the common sitting-room one evening after tea. I had taken Marion Kenneth's arm and drawn her along with me, cousin Morris following like a bit of iron obeying the magnet. Marion stood at the side of the fireplace with her hands hanging before her clasped, and her gaze bent upon the flames just subsiding upon a bed of glowing coals. In that attitude, and that light, her fragile figure and sensitive face, the whole serenely harmonious

person stood out softly irradiated in the otherwise unlighted room, so that just what she was, her charming spirit, her very sorrow, even, seemed to be vividly revealed.

Mrs. Lovell planted herself at the other side of the fireplace, in a large chair which she accurately fitted, while cousin Morris took a place in what might have been called the *parquette*, and I advanced to the pit. Aunt Maria had gone into the kitchen to scold the cook. Mrs. Lovell opened the scene.

"Are you of Puritan, or perhaps Quaker descent, Miss Kenneth?"

"Neither, I think, Mrs. Lovell."

"You *think*?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Lovell smiled faintly, with the corners of her mouth drawn down.

"There are plenty of other sources, to be sure," she allowed, "but we always presume, in our little corner here, that if a person is n't flesh, he must be fish, when there are the fowls, of course, that fly wherever there is a sky above them, and every state has its own traditions." (As if everybody's traditions must be one with the state's!) "What state do *you* come from, Miss Kenneth?"

"I come from everywhere; I'm cosmopolitan, I suppose."

"But were you *born* cosmopolitan?"

Marion looked at Mrs. Lovell with the helpless fixedness of a gentle but spirited creature brought to bay.

"If you mean to ask where I was born," she said slowly, "I am sorry I can't tell you. I never heard my mother say."

Mrs. Lovell did not utter her familiar "How peculiar!" She uttered nothing. She just sat dumb and stared. I turned in my torture, and glanced furtively at cousin Morris. In the flickering firelight, he looked like a man carved in stone, but his eyes winked very fast, and he said, —

"You are right to repulse my ferreting cousin."

"It is not at all a repulse," said Marion; "for some good reason, my mother chooses to keep many things from me; if they must be known" —

"Our guests' affairs are sacred to themselves," cousin Morris interposed. "Nobody under this roof asks to know more of them than is already apparent."

"Well, I don't know about that!" Mrs. Lovell responded, with an aroused look. "Speak for yourself, Morris. Why, here 's a romance — an unusual situation — which would be valuable material."

Not Beelzebub and all his fiends could turn Mrs. Lovell aside from her pursuit of "material." She would have plunged into the grave itself after something fine and dreary. Her pristine ardor had also, it appeared, been stimulated to wild determination by the visit of a lively young scribbler who, in disclaiming any great merit for her own productions, had at the same time naïvely disclaimed for Mrs. Lovell as well. "You know how it is yourself, Mrs. Lovell," she had said, "*we write what we would n't read.*" "Do we, indeed!" quoth Mrs. Lovell, and she had apparently registered a vow, then and there, that she would show 'em; now, *now* she would produce her masterpiece, which should prove to the whole race of men and women, that she *could* write "worthy the reading and the world's delight." Being rather destitute in point of imagination, she wanted so much the more material.

Something like an imprecation burst from Morris's lips at the sound of the hateful word, but Mrs. Lovell continued to plow her way on, under pressure of her oath.

"Your *mother* keeps these things from you," she said, with perhaps unconscious insolence, "but your *father* — what" —

"*Silence!*" The word boomed out in Morris's deepest chest tones.

But Mrs. Lovell was undaunted. "Oh, indeed!" she responded, with a forward motion, which had the effect of a low bow, and which brought her to her feet. "I *must* have your singular story, Miss Kenneth. I shall beg it of your mother, under a vow of eternal secrecy, of course, as to names."

"Oh, Mrs. Lovell!" cried Marion, her hands raised in praying. "*Don't* speak to mamma about this! It is something she cannot bear. *Doctor*" —

She turned to him with her hands still raised and clasped. It was an involuntary, self-forgetting appeal for her mother, to the one who had her mother's welfare in his keeping; but it seemed that to cousin Morris it came as the cry of her own need and helplessness. The blaze flared up and showed his illuminated face, as he rose eagerly, and approaching her, responded quickly, "Trust in me! Depend upon me!" Those were the words. I can tell you nothing of the tone, except that it both entreated and promised, all in the space of one suspended breath.

Of necessity, he followed the rampant Mrs. Lovell then, for he knew her to be capable of entering his patient's apartment, and demanding her history or her life.

Marion wandered to the door and returned,



in a vague, distracted way, slowly wringing her hands and speaking low. "What do they think we are?" she said again and again. "What do they think we are?"

It was not merely that my sympathy seemed such a futile consideration that I stood silent. I was struck dumb by the new aspect of things, and so far from listening to Miss Kenneth that I heard chiefly the tone in which cousin Morris had said, "Trust in me! Depend upon me!" his deep, comforting voice, tremulous with emotion. I still saw the quivering tenderness of the face he bent towards her, and it seemed to be clearly indicated to me that my pity might fitly remain at home. That which I had laid claim to, had looked for, and yearned for, day by day, ever since I had come into possession of my wild delusion, that which had been given me so often in my dreams had gone elsewhere, — had *gone*. It was clearly time for my delusion to depart. But ah, it had come to stay; we had been long together; it had taken almost a stronger hold than life. It could not, like life, be asked to "steal away, give little warning." The tender thing must be scourged out. I must lay rough hands upon it, and cast it forth, — must weep and cry out in the act.

Miss Kenneth vanished presently, as aunt Maria's step was heard returning, and after

lighting the lamp for this third and most afflicted one of all, I asked to be excused for the rest of the evening.

"Oh yes, no matter about me!" aunt Maria answered, and I felt that, indeed, for once, it was really no matter about aunt Maria. With my need pressing, I hurried away.

As I passed the library door, Mrs. Lovell sat in the arm-chair by the table, with a vague, amazed expression on her rather lateral lineaments, while cousin Morris paced the room with that look which has already been translated. His hands were clasped behind him, his shoulders thrown back, his head thrown back, his cheeks flushed with a warm glow, and those soft Saxon eyes that were not very quick to see the outsides of things, looking straight on as if into full revelation. This, I am sure, was that moment of election.

I stopped, spell-bound, and watched him, but he did not see me. Then I crept away up to my garret-window once more; bruised myself against the repudiated old chairs and tables; pushed on to the square of dim light at the farther end. The window was open, as I had left it. The November wind swept past it, raising wild tones as if it had been the mouth of a flute. Reaching out into the turbulent darkness, I mingled my own cry with that moan. There

the cruel deed was accomplished. I smothered it, crushed it, threw it forth into the night, — my dear delusion! — and then sat shivering with the terror of it, — sobbing with the agony of, having henceforth to live without it.

It was a long struggle, a hard struggle; it is not fitting that you should see it; but at length even that was at an end, and I was calm enough to hear the dull booming of the surf on far-away Horseneck Beach, the voice of eternal energy calling the roll of the strong.

I staggered to my feet, stiff, frozen within and without, and tried to be ready to respond. There was not the light of any star in the sky, and the city was dim beneath me, but looking out for the last time in the direction of my horizon, now veiled in blackness, I saw a ray of steady light; there for those in peril on the sea; but perhaps, at that moment, it was there for me, too. In place of the misty cradle of my hopes and dreams, that calm, constant lamp! And directly beneath me, a still brighter radiance presently streamed out, illuminating all the night about me. It was the peaceful light from Merab's bedroom window.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE RESULT OF THE PURSUIT.

DURING the rest of that night, I felt nothing, — absolutely nothing, — any more, unless it was the hollow world moving over on its axis, and carrying me passively through an arc of emptiness ; — empty save for aunt Maria's sighs. Just there in her room beside me, she sighed a plenty for us both. Yet she slept. She never stopped sleeping for sighing, and she never stopped sighing for anything. Day or night, that condition was the same.

In the morning, when I went to her, she stared at me wonderingly.

“What's the matter with you, Rebecca?” she asked. “You look as if you had n't slept. Better take a pill. When I don't sleep, I always take one of these in the morning.”

As aunt Maria had passed many years in an endeavor to rectify her own condition by pills, with indifferent success, her experience made me determine not to adopt that pursuit. The question of pill or no pill was the ground of a little

discussion. Aunt Maria and I, like Carlyle and Sterling, *except* in opinion, never disagreed; and for the most part, everything went well between us, except that there were days when I left the doors open, and let in mosquitoes and flies; days when I handled things in just the wrong way; when I spoke too low or too loud; and when all things predicated of me needed the adverb "*too*."

Our little debate concerning pills braced me up even more than the dose itself would have done. There is nothing like a good fit of obstinacy in the morning to give an impetus to the day.

After breakfast, Morris asked me to come to the library.

"I want to get you to do something for me," he said; "but" — and he hesitated, looking closely into my face — "you look tired. You're not well. We have n't taken good care of you. Tell me all about it. Are you having a very hard time? It must n't be, — it must n't be! You are a very precious article, that must be choicely kept."

I held my hands clasped behind me, dreading that he should follow his old custom, and take them in his own. A great, pent-up after-sob was ready to tear my tired heart.

He looked down at me kindly, even tenderly,



but I thought I saw and understood, comparing that look with what had been in his face the evening before. Everything seemed explicitly clear to me — even my own mistaken credulity, — the credulity of a very young thing, who had known nothing of love and the way of love, except the way of her own wishful heart.

And there was still another conviction as positive. If there could have been something wrong in my history, if I could have had some hidden woe, if in the beginning I could have looked up to him with these silently expressed in my tearful eye, the story of my life might have been different. It might never have been written. All other charms had been powerless, even in Miss Kenneth, and it seemed to me there was a time — Ah, who cannot say “there was a time?”

“I must not trouble you even to think a thought for me to-day,” cousin Morris pursued. “You really do look extremely ill. Go and rest. I shall take you out this afternoon. You need more air.”

“I need something new to think of, — something more to do,” I said. “I’m a little dull, and what you had proposed will be a boon. Tell me what it was.”

“Well, then, if you could just manage to keep an eye upon cousin Sophy, and see that

she does n't get at Mrs. Kenneth. There 'll be mischief if she does. Miss Kenneth has an appointment with the dentist this morning, and her mother will be unprotected unless " —

"Oh, is that all? I can easily do that!"

And I thought I could. But it was one thing to propose, and another to dispose, in case of Mrs. Lovell, plus the consideration of aunt Maria. As Mrs. Lovell could not be bound and gagged, there was a good deal to look out for, believe me.

It was arranged that I should sit with Mrs. Kenneth while Miss Kenneth was gone. The poor little woman really seemed fond of me. I was accustomed to visiting her every day, and practicing my professional arts upon her. She appeared to welcome these occasions, in her mute mournful fashion. But that morning, I thought she did not heed much that I said to her, — did not listen to the pleasant passages from the morning's newspaper and the freshly-cut magazine. Now and then, when I glanced up, I discovered a peculiar introverted look on her saint-like face, and once or twice a sharper movement and meaning in those usually languid eyes. At length I was puzzled by finding her lips curled in a scornful smile.

"You don't care for the story," I said.

"The story? Yes, oh, yes; it's delightful —

really lovely — but, dear Miss Parmalee, who is that woman ? ”

“ Which do you mean ? The one he met in the twilight ? ”

“ *That woman downstairs.* ”

“ Oh, Mrs. Lovell ? She ’s aunt Maria’s niece. She ’s a widow, without any family, and travels about a good deal. She always comes here to Thanksgiving. ”

“ *In-deed !* ” Mrs. Kenneth murmured, with a repetition of the scornful smile. “ Miss Parmalee, ” she added, laying her fragile hand on my arm, with a nervous clutch, “ *I* know what she is, and what she is here for. Don’t you notice how she looks at me ? ”

“ Oh, I hope you don’t mind that, ” I said soothingly. “ It ’s a way she has of studying people. She makes a study of character, and is really too aggressive in her pursuit of material, I think myself. ”

“ *Pursuit of material !* Ah, you understand her then ? how she pursues, and thinks to find material for building up her vile traductions. Don’t believe a word she says, Miss Parmalee, I beg you ! She ’s a base, false woman, and that is the very least of her crimes. ”

My amazement made me sit speechless, though hardly anything would have been too improbable to believe in connection with Mrs. Lovell hunting down material.

“Don’t mention what I’ve said, *please*, dear Miss Parmalee,” Mrs. Kenneth entreated, her little hot hand still clutching my arm, “but wait and see, — wait and see. You’re a friend to me, are n’t you? Yes, I think you are.”

“But tell me,” I gasped, “what is it about Mrs. Lovell?”

“Oh, don’t ask me that; wait and see, — wait and see!”

This was truly confounding, and I was about to venture a tentative inquiry as to the nature of Mrs. Lovell’s hidden crimes, when I heard aunt Maria’s voice calling me.

“Rebecca,” she said, when I responded, “do go down and make a sauce for the pudding, as I showed you the other day. That creature will mix up a slop again nobody can eat.”

“I promised not to leave Mrs. Kenneth.”

“Nonsense! Mrs. Kenneth does n’t need a body-guard every minute.”

“Cousin Morris is afraid” —

“Yes, I know all about that. More nonsense. I shall be here. I can keep the wolf from the lamb, if necessary.”

It was time Miss Kenneth should return. Aunt Maria would be a probable defense until then. I investigated, found Mrs. Lovell seated peaceably in the library, apparently absorbed in her sinful scribbling, and went to the kitchen

with a passably good conscience. While I creamed the butter for my sauce, I concocted new explanations for the aversion with which Mrs. Lovell had always inspired me. It was the instinctive dread of a masked evil-doer. The look with which Mrs. Kenneth had said, "*I know what she is, and what she is here for,*" meant strange things. Mrs. Lovell had doubtless pushed her raids even into the unknown, mysterious region that Mrs. Kenneth had come from. What had she done there? Had she, possibly, killed somebody, in a desperate struggle after material? I fancied her lurking in a dark wood or behind a door. Behind a door! *Behind a door!* Was that why Mrs. Kenneth always looked behind the doors, — to see if Mrs. Lovell was there? My sympathies warmed and expanded towards poor Mrs. Kenneth. I whipped in my sugar, made my hot starch in hot haste, and leaving the components of the sauce ready to be whisked together when aunt Maria should come on with the wine, I flew away to my charge. Mrs. Lovell was not in the library, as I passed. I ran upstairs, filled with forebodings, — I hardly knew of what, — and reaching the top landing, what should I see, in deed and in truth, but the criminal herself, coming quickly and softly out of Mrs. Kenneth's room like a cat. I don't know *what* I exclaimed!



My voice sounded husky. I could hardly speak at all, I was so smothered by indignation and alarm.

And the redoubtable Mrs. Lovell actually looked frightened herself. She gave me no reply, but hurried across to her own room and locked the door.

What stupendous thing could have arrested and turned back this indomitable persistence of force? And what was aunt Maria doing? Nodding comfortably over her favorite Psalm, that promised her so much beatitude, and her enemies utter extinction, as sound asleep as a dormouse in the winter.

Mrs. Kenneth I found standing at the farther end of her room, rigid and livid. At sight of me, she quickly concealed something by thrusting it into her pocket, and then throwing herself into my arms, sobbed and reiterated that I was her friend, and begged me to save her! save her! save her!

I soothed her as best I could, all the while feeling that something in her pocket—something hard and heavy—thumping against my knees.

Before this scene was ended, Miss Kenneth came in, stopped aghast in the doorway at sight of it, and then, with a low cry, like a mother-bird settling down over her imperiled nestling,

took my burden into her own arms, hovering it, brooding it, soothing it, pitying it, as if it had been something sorely hurt. I stood like a post, not knowing whether to go or stay, until she made a sign to me, with a pleading look, — a look I shall never forget, — to leave her alone with her mother.

Neither of them came down to dinner, and when the maid returned from taking it up to them, she said Mrs. Lovell would dine in her own room also.

“Lord, mem,” said the girl, “she’s afeared to open the door. She spake to me through the kay-hole, an’ axed me twicet was it me, sure, an’ was I tellin’ the truth.”

“What upon earth is the matter now?” aunt Maria exclaimed, dropping her fork, and falling back in her chair as if she asked what was the use of her taking any more nourishment, since she was sure to be put to death by her trials in another instant. “What under the sun is the reason nobody can come to dinner? What ails Sophia Lovell?”

This appeal seemed to be addressed to me.

“She paid a visit to Mrs. Kenneth while I was in the kitchen,” I answered.

“What do you mean by such an assertion as that? Don’t you suppose I know what happened under my own nose, while you were in the kitchen?”

“When I came back, I met Mrs. Lovell in Mrs. Kenneth’s doorway,” I persisted.

“We-ll, I *de-clare*! Subjective pseudopia! I knew you were in a bad way,” said aunt Maria, forgetting Sophia Lovell and looking upon me with interest.

I was too weary to carry the subject farther. If I had accused aunt Maria of having been asleep, that would only have confirmed her belief in my pseudopial condition.

During the rest of the dinner, she explained this condition to me, and delivered an able prophylactic and therapeutic discourse, which ought to have been edifying, but the spirit was both unwilling and weak, — so weak that the only idea I gained from that learned lecture was that my supposition of having seen Mrs. Lovell coming from Mrs. Kenneth’s room was a consequence of having grown too rapidly during a few years.

While aunt Maria was lecturing, I continually repeated to myself the words with which a good old minister I knew had been used to begin his prayer: “It’s a we-ary world we live in, O Lord; and its pa-in-ful clay we’re made of!” He had breathed it out like a long moan, as if it rested him to complain a little, and it seemed easier to me to endure while I secretly bewailed.

The painful clay which I called my own was deposited, after dinner, upon the sofa in the sitting-room, by my aunt's peremptory orders. I was to take a nap, and continue to do so every day, until force enough could accumulate to work the machinery of life with more precision, especially in the department of brains. Aunt Maria appeared to regard my brains as weak, and to make some pitiful allowance for me accordingly.

"If you see people moving about here," she said, "don't pay any attention to them, for such appearances are as likely as not to be subjective — mere delusions."

"How do I know that you're not one, this minute, aunt Maria? Do these things ever speak?"

"Why, of course; there's pseudotia, as well as pseudopia. You can tell by touching them — or trying to."

"How dreadful! to be obliged to touch everybody, before you can know whether they are anybody or not! I take you for pseudo, aunt Maria; I shall pay no more attention to you."

Saying this, I turned away from that embodiment of the theory and practice of medicine, closing my eyes; and aunt Maria suffered this lightness, in consideration of my feebleness of mind.

Then, alone and in silence, all the emptiness of existence was open to me again. I mourned for the ship that had wrecked below the horizon, and, not having made up my mind to die of my woe, looked on to a long life of mourning. No lot of my own! No lot of my own! This inward cry was the last, for I directly fell off my point of support, which was all earth seemed to offer me, and dropped deeply into the absolute nothingness — the blessed deeps of oblivion — in which we taste the sweetness of death again and again, and arise to go on dreading it.

Then there seemed to be a dream of people looking down at me with the last look, as if I had been dead; of trying to move and say that I was not dead; of Marion Kenneth, drawn away under some strange coercion; of Mrs. Kenneth, leaning upon, yet commanding her. But, with the folly of a dreamer, I said, “Pseudopia! — I should n’t wonder!” and dropped back into deep oblivion again.

Out of the void, after some ages of time, as it seemed to me, I heard a voice calling gently, “Rebecca! Rebecca!” and opened my eyes to find Morris sitting beside my sofa, regarding me in a scrutinizing, sorrowful fashion, as if I had been a suffering child.

Though sorrow seemed to fill every inlet of my life, it could not exclude a sudden, unrea-



sonable rushing-in of joy at this sight. Who does not know that though oxygen itself would consume life, yet one must consume a little oxygen to live?

"Is this pseudopia and pseudotia?" I muttered, in a bewildered way.

"What do you know about pseudopia and pseudotia?" Morris returned, frowning a little.

"Oh, I'm getting to know a few things," I declared.

"Well, so you are, upon my word; and you're getting to say a few things, too, which I hope you'll explain, Rebecca."

I sat up alarmed. "Oh, indeed, what have I said?"

"Life is not worth living! Life is not worth living!' — that sort of thing — over and over. What does it mean?" His frown deepened, and he looked wholly absorbed in the interest of the question.

"Well, it means that I'm quarrelsome. I quarrel even with life," I answered, giving an impatient toss to the afghan with which aunt Maria had covered me.

"Don't do it!"

"Then it need n't be so aggravating."

"But what is it, Rebecca? Who is it? Tell me — tell me! Has anybody — Is anything" — He seemed really a good deal perturbed, as he leaned towards me.

"Oh dear, no! Nobody has, and it is nothing. To confess the whole truth, I am an unpleasant person."

"M-m?" He made the rejoinder, falling back into his chair again, with his lips closed firmly. "Your unpleasantness is of a somewhat pleasant kind, Rebecca. I must say that for my part I like it well enough. 'A singing maid, with pictures in her eyes.' I like her well enough — well enough," he added musingly.

"Thank you," I returned, with a sharp pang and a profound *révérance*.

"But look here, Rebecca," he persisted, "is n't this something new, — this wrangle of yours with life? I thought you were on the best of terms with it. It is pretty dull, at present, for a person of your temperament, but how do you know what it means to do with you, by and by?"

"Oh, I'm more concerned to know what I'm to do with it, than what it is to do with me."

"You'll do something felicitous with it, Rebecca, — something successful. It is easy to foresee that. You'll be a joyful and a joy-giving woman. That destiny is written in every line of your face." He studied my face a moment, and then exclaimed: "But good gracious! don't let us sit here discussing life, with the sun

getting on at the rate of sixty minutes an hour. It is half past three already. Your sleep was not doing you good, or I should not have ventured to wake you. Come and take a breath of air. That is what you need. Get your hat. My carriage is at the door, and we'll find out, as we go along, why life is not worth living, even to a poor old thing turned seventeen."

I did not dare to go. I was not steady and strong enough to endure any more scrutiny. There had not been time to make myself easy and at home in the new conditions of disappointment and permanent sorrow, so I said, "Oh, I thank you, I can't go to-day."

"*Can't?* Why not? But no matter why not. You really must come."

"Could n't you take Mrs. Kenneth for a short drive first, to divert her? I'm very sorry, but Mrs. Lovell got into her room, after all, while I was in the kitchen for a few minutes. She seems strangely upset by it. She has a surprising opinion of Mrs. Lovell."

Cousin Morris made an inarticulate sound, which meant more than regret. It seemed to touch a note of dismay.

"I had best see her. Yes, you are right. I must attend to Mrs. Kenneth, and after that the case of Rebecca versus life comes on."

I could see that he was more troubled than

he cared to have me know, and that he kept his cheerful tone that I might not feel reproached.

He hurried on upstairs, and I heard him knock at Mrs. Kenneth's door, with no response. He knocked again. Still no response. I ran up myself, opened the door, and looked in, — went on into Marion's room. All vacant and silent.

"I guess they're safe, — don't worry," said the voice of irony from aunt Maria's room.

"But where are they?" and "Where?" cousin Morris and I both asked.

"Well, they stepped out for a walk, a short time ago."

"A walk? I did not care to have Mrs. Kenneth walk to-day. I advised her — advised Miss Kenneth. She is losing ground. I'm sorry — I'm sorry."

Cousin Morris moved about in his mother's room, knitting his brows and jingling the contents of his pockets, as he said this.

"They never go far; you might overtake them and drive Mrs. Kenneth back," I suggested.

"Which way did they take, mother?"

Aunt Maria nodded towards the north, and Morris went down directly, without more words, sprang into his buggy, and drove northward.

Mrs. Kenneth was easily fatigued. Her walks

were usually a mere saunter across a block or two, and back again. An hour passed by, however, and she had not returned. Morris came again and again, looking more agitated each time. At first he asked, "Have they come?" but at length he only fixed his eyes upon me, and I shook my head.

No, and again no — no — they had not come. Once, twice, three times, the clock marked the singular fact that the Kenneths had been gone another hour. The afternoon went by, darkness came, tea-time arrived and departed, but Mrs. Kenneth *never* came.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### ANOTHER PURSUIT.

WHATEVER were cousin Morris's feelings in regard to this unceremonious departure, he kept them wholly to himself, and discouraged any mention of the subject; an example which aunt Maria, who enjoyed a new and peculiar kind of ill-treatment, did by no means follow.

"It makes me despise the whole human race to find it capable of producing such abominable specimens," she said, when I took her up her tea that evening, for she carried her despite to the extent of refusing to have tea with any of the race. "What is the use of civilization," she went on, as if she were charging a jury, "what is the use of having struggled up out of a savage state, where one Bushman is as good as another" (aunt Maria's ideas of the depths out of which she had struggled were rather confused), "what is the use of having come up into what is *called* the light and liberty of the nineteenth century, when respectable people are forced to live in this mixed-up fashion with folks

who don't dare to tell who they are or where they came from? I suppose the Bushmen or the Cave-dwellers, or whatever you please to call them, had their bushes and their caves to themselves, but I can't have my own roof. Oh that woman! That scandalous woman! Sophia Lovell says she had a revolver. You may say she was crazy. I don't believe it. It's a wonder we were n't all murdered in our beds, sleeping night after night with assassins in the house. We've had a merciful escape, and we ought to thank God. I don't expect to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. But why are *some* people called to suffer so much more than others?"

To this frequently propounded and not unreasonable question my aunt could never get a reply.

"Will you have something more, aunt?" I asked, in an interval of breathing, trying to steady my mind by fixing it upon some definite point in the path of duty, at the same time that I shivered and reeled at the recollection of that something hard and heavy in Mrs. Kenneth's pocket, and the possible explanation of it I had just heard.

"No, I thank you," aunt Maria replied; "I regard *immensely* what I have had, but I don't wish for any more."

“Would n’t you have liked more toast?” I ventured, soothingly, seeing that there was not left a crumb of anything on her tray.

“No, I’m obliged to you; I don’t care for any more *cold toast*.”

Even the toast, brought fiercely hot from the fire, and allowed to stand cooling during a long harangue, was a symbol of her martyrdom.

Imagine one of the early Christians, having perhaps thirsted for martyrdom, arrived at the glory of it, and finding it not much more inconvenient than the ordinary pains of living! Think of enjoying all the importance of cruciation without any unusual pangs! Then, trust me, aunt Maria was happy, for she was universally commiserated and commended. She had, of course, been used abominably, and as there was not much, of an active nature, that she could do about it, she had the effect, to outsiders, of enduring in patience.

As I went down from aunt Maria’s room, I heard Mrs. Lovell pouring out *her* feelings. It was an enormous stream, and the sound of it was strong and steady, during the moments in which I was slowly balancing myself and the tray in descending. When I came to the bottom of the stairs, the torrent held up for an instant, and I heard Morris say with deep-toned severity, —

"I told you it was not a sane woman you had to deal with; I warned you."

Fortunately I was near the hall table, where I could drop my tray with safety, or it might have gone crashing to the floor, I was so shaken by this sudden elucidation, — so astounded to see, in one quick flash, the reason of everything, — of Marion's buried sadness, her loneliness, her strangeness, her forced wanderings; to see clearly, after all, Mrs. Kenneth's madness manifest in keeping everything a secret from her child, — in making the child a mystery to herself.

It all swept upon me in a moment, — the moment in which Morris was saying, in the tone of a tortured man who has reached the bounds of endurance, —

"I beg you to go — go — leave me! I should like not to see you again, if you please."

Mrs. Lovell sailed out of the library then, full-freighted with injured dignity, and Morris, coming to close the door after her, saw me sitting confounded in the hall chair, and asked to speak with me a moment, a call that I answered with thankfulness, for it seemed that I must say something to somebody or perish.

"I heard what you said! I know it all now! Why did n't you tell *me*? It need n't have been," I began at once.

"Never mind about turning the screw tighter,"

Morris answered, making me sit down, and dropping wearily into a chair himself. "I had only just begun to be sure of it myself, Rebecca, — since Sophia Lovell has been here. Dr. Godwin recognized it long ago. Mrs. Kenneth, it seems, has a special mania, which lies quiet until some accident excites it. Sophia Lovell has managed to do that, with her infernal staring and ferreting. She's enough to distract a sane mind. It was not advisable to publish this discovery, though I should have told you, but you have n't learned to dissemble. I knew your manner with Mrs. Kenneth would unconsciously change. You would have shown quite plainly a new constraint — a watchfulness — a something, which her abnormally keen perceptions would have taken note of in an instant. It was your unconscious naturalness and frankness that made you a help to her. We could n't afford to lose that. What I wanted to ask now was whether you had looked about in the rooms at all, to see if there is any indication that they did not mean to come back?"

"Yes, I have; and there is nothing, — except on Mrs. Kenneth's dressing-table, — some money. An acknowledgment of her debt to you, perhaps."

Suddenly I remembered my dream, — or was it a partial awakening? — and various actual in-



stances of Mrs. Kenneth's power over her daughter.

"She has a will, I can tell you, — has that little timid-looking woman," I declared. "If Mrs. Kenneth would go, Marion must follow, and in Mrs. Kenneth's own appointed way, you see."

"Yes, yes, I see," said cousin Morris, with a groan. "Tell me if you know anything that would be a guide to finding them. Think carefully!"

"Wait a little; have patience! Marion will write," I said.

"*Wait!*" Morris repeated, as if pronouncing a strange word with no meaning. "You don't quite understand. Have they never spoken of any particular place more than of another?"

"There is no particular place," I assured him, and then went on to tell what Marion had told me, — that during her whole life there had been only her mother and herself, forever wandering. And unable to check the communicative impulse, I recalled those suggestions of loneliness, of eternal homesickness, of the girl's longing to know more of her own relations to life, her yearning for a father's love, a father's home.

And all the while, I suppose, Morris's heart was filling with tenderness. He sat leaning his

elbows on the table, with his face buried in his hands. But still on and on I went, until I had drawn such a pathetic figure, surrounded it with such a halo, that I was ready to fall down and worship it myself. For the first time, I forgot my own sorrow in thinking of a child who had discovered the sorrows of life in its mother's eyes, the uses of its own life in its mother's woes.

"I suppose there are ways of finding people who are lost," I suggested hopefully, after a long silence had at length fallen upon us. "If they don't write, or come, we might hear of some clue."

"Might? We *will*!" Morris lifted his head and answered in something like the tone with which Salvini says "*Vorrei, che dico? Voglio!*"

At that moment a carriage stopped, the bell rang, and, without waiting for it to be answered, young Dr. Felton entered, knocked at the library door, and, again, without waiting for a response, walked in. He was Morris's closest friend, and what happened to one, the other was apt to know very soon. He acknowledged my presence, and then said in the quiet, deliberate way cultivated by young physicians: "Your plan is right, Beverley. Holmes saw them take the afternoon train. The man at the ticket-office

describes them perfectly, and remembers that they took tickets to Boston. I find that that freight train starts at half past eight, instead of nine o'clock. There has been some change, so you'll have to be on the move. You'll have just time to pack your bag, and I'll drive you to the station."

Morris hurried away without a word.

"And when he gets to Boston, what will he do then?" I asked.

"I should hope he would inquire at the hotels for Mrs. and Miss Kenneth," Dr. Felton replied.

"But what if they took an evening train to somewhere else?"

"Then I should advise Beverley to try to find out what train they took, and to what place they were bound."

"I don't see how he could do that. They may be lost and swallowed up in the great whirlpool of New York city before to-morrow morning. How is anybody to find them there?"

"Oh, New York! You can find anything in New York. You need n't be concerned, Miss Parmalee; Beverley is n't going to let a patient in that condition get away from him. We easily catch the villains we want to hang, when they are using all their sharp wits to hide themselves. Do you think two simple-minded women, travel-

ing leisurely along the beaten way, can't be overtaken by their friends?"

That was the way Dr. Felton looked at it, and I accepted his view.

Then my concern was for cousin Morris himself, traveling to Boston in the night on a freight train, which his haste obliged him to do, the train the Kenneths had taken having been the last passenger train out of the city until the following morning. I began to think, as a woman always will think of such matters, that my cousin would be hungry before he reached Boston by that slow method, not having taken any supper to speak of; so I hurried with all speed and made up a nice square parcel, that looked like a book, which I tucked into his overcoat pocket, and pleased myself with thinking that when he came to thrust his hands into the usual position for reflection, which he was perfectly sure to do, he would discover that the ravens had not been so very partial to Elijah, after all.

And that was the last thing I had a chance to do for Morris for a long time, unless it was to persuade his mother, occasionally, not to send a second detective force after him.

It was some time after he had gone before I went up to aunt Maria. I had, in fact, scarcely taken the forgotten tray to the kitchen and re-

turned to the library, where I had picked up a pair of Morris's gloves that lay on the table, and stood holding them, smoothing them musingly, and about to drop a few tears upon them, when, fortunately for the gloves, which would have been ruined by such treatment, the front door flew open and shut again, after which I heard a well-known tramping, and explosive warnings, as of a vagrant volcano about to erupt. Somebody hurried through the hall, throwing his hat at the rack, to judge by the sound, and stopped in the doorway before me, with his necktie askew and completely untied. In place of "Good-evening" he saluted with some startling interjections, then taking a short trip across the room, he continued to send out rumblings and sparks, turned and took a longer trip back into the hall again, returned, hustled the chairs about a little, as if he had a good mind to sit down, gave up the idea with scorn, and facing about, fixed his eyes upon me and began:—

"The devil take these infernal novel-writers! Let them go to Tophet after their material! What's become of this one? Is she still at large? Yes? A pretty state of things she was n't muzzled! Is n't there sham stuff enough, in all conscience, but they're beginning to think they must have our true histories? Confound their sticking their noses into decent



people's doorways! They'd better keep out of *my* way! I'd shoot one of 'em as soon as I'd shoot a badger! *Hear* me? Well, I hope she does hear me. It's time she heard that there's a dangerous man loose, and if she wants to feel safe she'd better run back to Rhode Island. Donner und Blitzen! What's one language when you have such things as these to talk about? Sacry Deer! What were you all doing here?"

He paused an instant, as if to take breath, while I stood dumb at the amazed contemplation of such an awful temper; then, presently, to my further surprise, he said in quite a gentle tone: "I would n't have thought it of you, Rebecca!"

"But I did n't know exactly how it was. If I had only known" — I hastened to plead.

"Well, but good heavens, when you don't know, you must suspect. Now, do you suppose you can be relied upon, in future, to be a good, sharp, suspicious girl?"

"Oh, if she comes back" —

"*Comes back!* Ah-h!" Dr. Godwin said this with a really mournful quaver in his voice, and began to move about again.

"That girl! That girl!" he murmured, and by this time he had reached the very tenderest tones.

He apparently gave a long thought to Marion, his whole face growing beautiful with sorrow and compassion.

“Rebecca, she’s a marvel! she’s an angel!” he said. “Do you think she understands?”

“It seems as if she did not.”

“Well, what seems so, is so, in her case. She’s as open as the sunshine. Her mother might put the devil off his calculations. Poor soul! poor soul! It is altogether remarkable! Hm! Hm! Hm!” (These ejaculations represent what he said to himself, resuming his promenade.) “Her mind is remarkably clear and competent in some respects,” he continued aloud in a meditative tone. “She has managed her affairs very well, apparently, and the poor child seems to be pretty fairly educated. Yet she told me she was never in a school in her life, — that her mother and the books she had read had been her only teachers. No, I don’t quite wonder the girl has never suspected. My daughters don’t suspect me. But you do, Rebecca, eh? Mind you look sharp, or you’ll make another mistake. Well, now, my child, I’ve been thinking of you. You remember I adopted you some time ago. I’m your father. You can’t stay here alone with these — ahem! You can’t stay here, Rebecca. It’s too lonesome. You must come to my house for a while. Mrs. Stone-

bridge has her materialist here with her. She don't need you. There, go get your bonnet and come along. What, you won't? You mean to stay here? You — don't — tell — me! Well, Rebecca, I like you better than ever; for you've plenty of pluck. A charming quality! I adore it! I feel much the same emotion for you that I do for one Shadrach we read of. You remember? (In a deep whisper.) Fiery furnace, you know. And I'll wager my hat — Well, where is my hat? What have I done with it? Oh, there it is! It looks rather battered; I won't wager that; but I'll wager a brand-new one that you'll come out with that nice black hair of yours as unsinged as Mr. Shadrach's was. But that other poor child — poor child!" — and Dr. Godwin took a final journey round the room, groaning as he went, and resorting to his pocket handkerchief. "There, good-night, good-night. Merciful heavens, what a little cold claw! Go and get warm — go — go! Take some ginger tea; and tell Madam Stonebridge I shall come in to see her in the morning. Good-night, good-night." And Dr. Godwin went out much more quietly than he had come in, picking up his hat with an indifferent ease, poking out the dent in it, and giving it a hasty brush, which seemed to say it was no matter, such things would happen to the best of fellows. But before he closed the

door after himself, I heard him mutter again, "Poor child, poor child!" and the last sound I heard was a groan.

Then I went directly up to aunt Maria. But *was* it aunt Maria that I found? — the aunt Maria whom I had left sitting in the seat of the scornful, as straight as her own knitting needles, with her head thrown high, and tossing from one indignant jerk to another, while she delivered her glib tirade? Could aunt Maria look so absolutely wilted down and miserable as the person who now sat in that seat? I had seen her try to look as wretched as that, but this time it was not the dramatic art; it was genuine sorrow. The little sharp eyes had been weeping profusely, and there was a droop at the corners of the mouth, which was carried out in her whole aspect, — a universal limpness, that left hardly a token by which to remember aunt Maria. As I entered the room, I perceived a slight spasmodic action of the occipital joint, but, compared with the old every-day jerk, it was "but an empty vaunt, — a thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want."

"Why, aunt Maria!" I said, compassionately.

"Oh, it's no — no matter about me!" she responded, faintly, and those familiar household words had a new tone, and assumed a new meaning. "Go away! Don't speak to me!" she

added, and in obeying, I asked myself what could be the meaning of these new manifestations. But when I had returned to the library, and seated myself at the table where the gloves lay one upon another, like a pair of folded hands, some pang of my own revealed to me aunt Maria's woe.

"He has told her!" I said, "or she has guessed it! She thinks that some other woman is dearer than she is."

Poor aunt Maria!



## CHAPTER XV.

### TO BOSTON VIA SPARTA.

It was Merab who was really overcome when she was told of poor Mrs. Kenneth's trouble, and how it was that they had all gone, that various ships had wrecked, and that life had been discovered to be not worth living. Dear soul! what an avalanche of bad news to pour upon her in a minute! She was immeasurably more distressed than she would have been if it had concerned herself definitely and directly; and even the cheering assurance that she was needed as a consolator did not make her lose a certain dazed and sorrowing look for many a day. But I am sure it was Marion she was thinking of chiefly, during all that time.

Well, and I do beg you to believe that these were altogether hard times in the cheering-up business! Yet those very days — those — were halcyon days to our neighbor, Friend Reuben Rogers.

Seeing that we were not very happy, he came over every morning, without fail, as if by ap-

pointment, and sat in the chair by the west window in the sitting-room, and shot off his moral reflections, choosing from his unfailing store those which had the strongest tendency to discouragement and gloom. And these were answered — sometimes at close range, and sometimes from afar — by impatient ejaculations, like minute-guns, from aunt Maria. The precious promise in which she professed to hope — that her strength should be equal to her day — could not be expected to cover that part of the day in which Friend Reuben paid his visits.

The infliction of these visits was offset by the as regular appearance of Dr. Godwin. He kept our heads above water during some dismal days, and so shocked and exasperated Sophia Lovell that after staying by as long as there was a spark of endurance, in the hope of hearing some news from cousin Morris which would be material for her, she packed up and marched on to new undertakings.

For there was absolutely *no* material in the messages that came from Morris. They would have been immaterial even to us, if they had not shown us that he was alive, and allowed us to hope that he was well, and told us that he was to-day in Worcester or Springfield, and after that in Albany or Buffalo, — and so on, half across the continent,

No doubt cousin Morris's own story of those days would be the one of interest, if it could but be told. To him, what innumerable miles, interminable hours, endless thought, endless hope, endless pains, endless patience, endless manœuvrings of cunning men who knew exactly what they were about, and what they were coming to ; of coming then to definite traces, — smouldering camp - fires just deserted, so to speak, — nearer and nearer, until at length the pursued ones are overtaken, — the *wrong* ones !

With us, at aunt Maria's, meantime, though we had a Thanksgiving, we did not know it ; there had been a Christmas and a New Year's day, unnoted by us, when, one evening, a pale, worn man with heavy eyes walked in at our door, embraced aunt Maria, took some notice of me, and then lay quietly down upon the sitting-room couch, closed his eyes and said nothing.

It was as if a wretched shell cracked and fell off aunt Maria. Don't tell me there is n't something fine and high in every one of us ! She went about like a mother of Sparta !

Her son was suffering from an acute form of disappointment, — poor fellow ! Is that a disease ? Well, then, Dr. Godwin could devise no remedy at all for it, and though it seemed a case within his own line of research, — a serious suffering of the heart, perhaps, — cousin Morris

himself appeared to be under a pitiable weight of ignorance as to how it was to be cured or endured.

Aunt Maria, unlike the mother of young Wilhelm who dwelt in the city of Cologne, did not propose to make any of *her* candles into wax hearts, or accompany her son on any pilgrimage — to Kevlaar or elsewhere — for his relief, so that there is not such an exquisitely tender and touching crisis to my cousin's ailment as that of which Heine tells. There was, without doubt, more reason, if less poetry, in aunt Maria's method of treatment. She acquired an absorbing interest in the human heart as an organ, providentially or otherwise, subject to a variety of curable and incurable diseases, one of which her son had ostensibly been created and sent into the world to attend to. She read all the medical journals and reviews, and discussed his favorite topic with him continually. I am positively sure that, if she did not write it herself, she persuaded some one to write a long, elaborate attempt to show the fallacy of cousin Morris's special theory, which aroused him to make another long and elaborate effort in the contrary direction. She managed, gradually, to bring him almost to feel that hardly, since Harvey advanced the momentous theory of the arterial circulation, had there been such an impression

made upon the medical world as his hypothesis was making. It was amazing how frequently — and all upon a sudden, too — it was being mentioned and discussed. Now and then Dr. Godwin brought in some medical man who was simply rabid on the subject. I marveled at the number of men who had apparently gone rabid, and refused to talk about anything else. And aunt Maria was forever coming forward with a fresh journal in which the subject was persistently agitated. It was surprising, even if one only thought of it as the persistence of aunt Maria and Dr. Godwin, or perhaps I should say especially if one thought of it as all accomplished by these two cunning old plotters.

Now there are few people whose grief will not give room to some pleasing satisfaction at the consciousness — even the bare supposition — that they are making an important mark in the world. So my cousin's woes came to be intermittent with an agreeable, exciting attention he was obliged to give to other matters. His thought was so actively engrossed by the necessity of supporting his theory, that if I had not understood the moody silence and the sighs, the hours of mournful apathy that intervened, I should have suspected him of having forgotten Miss Kenneth altogether. Not at all.

It was in the middle of March that Dr. Day-



ton, a distinguished Boston specialist, with whom cousin Morris was a marked favorite, as a rising young practitioner who was likely to accomplish something in his own line of research, wrote Morris that he was about to bring a rare case before the Suffolk County Society for Medical Improvement, and honored him with an invitation to be present at the discussion of it.

Morris almost warmed to enthusiasm in the anticipation of this privilege, and started for Boston one morning with something like his old expression of being glad to be an active, conscious particle among the forces which operate for the good of the human race.

Aunt Maria had come to be quite her own self again, and dropped down—in my mind at least—from those associations with Sparta which had made her really admirable, so that we were as nearly as possible back in the old times; aunt Maria busy with her soul and her circulation, and I with aunt Maria as a whole. In these cheerful habitudes we passed a day or two, and then we were roused by an exciting event. A telegram arrived, which aunt Maria read with one pair of glasses, and then put on two pairs to double the chances of seeing correctly. By the expression of her countenance she seemed to say that it could n't be possible she had understood the drift of this communication.

"I should like to know what he means by such a proposition as *that!*" she exclaimed, then, tossing the telegram across a table, at which we were both seated, planning out the arrangement of pieces for a silk *couvrepiéd*, which we were making together.

"Shall I read it?"

"Yes, and translate it into something decent and reasonable, if you can."

I was obliged to suppress myself, in order that my delight in this telegram should not be apparent, for the drift of it, to me, was this:—

"*Let Rebecca come to Boston at 4.20. Absalom must put her on train and I will meet her here.*"

Aunt Maria looked at me and I looked at her in silence for a moment.

"What do you make of *that?*" she asked.

"He wants me for something," I answered, too dazed myself to know what I did answer.

"Wants *you!* Well, I never did! What, for mercy's sake, could *you* be wanted for? And does he think I'm going to send you up there alone, to canter round the streets of Boston with *him?* He's out of his senses completely, and Dr. Godwin had better go down and fetch him back."

I prayed to Heaven for help, and kept silence, trying to fix my mind upon the proportion-

ate mixture of light and dark colors in my squares of silk patchwork. Cousin Morris's request was sure to be properly regarded. Aunt Maria would perhaps take up her rôle of Spartan mother again and go down to Boston with me.

In about half an hour, however, she had decided to go only so far as to the next door. She put on her bonnet and went over to see Friend Merab, while I threw the patchwork into its basket, and went, all palpitating, to consider the toilet I should make for a trip to Boston.

My resources were much like those of Mercy Atkins, of whom I had heard that, in her young days, when a certain agreeable John Tilden came to ask her out for a drive, to surprise him with her possibilities she had asked, within his hearing, "What dress shall I wear, mother?" to which her mother had responded, — quite within hearing, too, — "Wear th' gown, child. Thee knows thee has but one."

This I said to myself in buttoning my boots, and when aunt Maria presently returned with the good news that Merab Austen would go to Boston with me, I had only to slip into this gown, put some things into my little crewel-worked bag, and assuming my best hat and sacque and gloves, offer myself for transportation to Boston.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SOMEBODY NEEDS MERAB.

AND thus it was that, on an evening of the first of March, a charming little Quakeress, who made every eye light up with pleasure as it fell upon her, and a girl of eager, inquiring aspect, evidently willing to see pleasure in the situation, were dining at a hotel in Boston, under the protection of a tall and fair young man, who might have been taken for the best German type.

The young man himself had a preoccupied air, and from time to time you might have noticed that his companions cast wondering glances at each other. But well they might, for they had neither of them the faintest idea why they were in Boston. One of them had been summoned, it is true. That was the cardinal why, but the ultimate wherefore was still a mystery.

The three indulged in no conversation to speak of, though the girl made profuse observations, evincing that, clearly, she was there to observe, let other considerations be what they might.

She left her grapes and oranges at length, and leaning upon the arm of her chair, looked expectantly at the young man, as if, the preamble having reached its final period, something explanatory might be expected to follow.

Then, as the little Quakeress had entirely finished folding her napkin in its exact creases, the young man of Teutonic type, whom we may call Dr. Beverley, proposed an adjournment to the small yellow parlor which was their own.

There, the little Quakeress settled gently down upon a bloated yellow chair, like a soft brown bird alighting upon a cowslip bank, and looked about at things with the interest of one to whom almost anything outside her own door was new and exciting; but the girl stood waiting under the chandelier, with her hands in the pockets of her jacket, and an air which said plainly that she hoped she had not come to Boston to sit down in a little yellow parlor.

But Dr. Beverley, regardless of this hint, having seated himself, crossed his legs in a leisurely fashion, and tucked his left hand under his right knee, and brought out his handkerchief and replaced it, and gazed a few seconds at the carpet before he remarked:

“No doubt you suspect why I took the liberty of asking you to come up to Boston.”

The little Quakeress shook her head dubi-



ously, and the girl flounced about a little in token of her impatience.

"It would be quite a satisfaction to know the worst," she said. "It must be something very solemn and dreadful."

The young man faithfully continued to be himself, — that is, to be moderate, — but he went so far as to say : —

"There is some one here who needs you, — needs you both."

"Needs *me*!" cried the little Quakeress softly, beginning to draw one of her gloves on the wrong hand, as if to be ready.

"Needs the comfort of kind friends; needs protection, but she won't accept mine," proceeded Dr. Beverley, still gradually. "She mistakes my devotion for sacrifice, and she can't accept sacrifice. You remember that, Rebecca?"

"For mercy's sake, do tell us something! Friend Merab, it's Marion Kenneth!" Rebecca cried out, moving herself, and especially her hands about, as if under a series of electric shocks. "Was Dr. Dayton's case *Mrs. Kenneth*?"

Friend Merab made vague exclamatory sounds, while Dr. Beverley indicated "Yes," by a grave bend of his head.

Then Rebecca sat down, in decent quiet, saying : —

“And she has” —

“Died,” concluded Dr. Beverley.

There was a long, silent pause, to give a tender thought to that poor, sad little woman, when Rebecca continued : —

“How long” —

“About two weeks ago.”

“And why have we been left to find this out by accident?”

“Miss Kenneth wrote me soon after they left us, but her letter was probably among some that Dr. Godwin forwarded to me, which have never been heard from. The poor old fellow was so excited and upset, he might easily have made any mistake. Miss Kenneth, naturally, would not have written a second time.”

“Where is she now?”

“With a Dr. Phebe Carnes, on Columbus Avenue, who chanced to be in the station when Miss Kenneth arrived in Boston with her mother. Mrs. Kenneth was in the state to have been expected from a combination of excitement with her other conditions. The doctress discovered the whole situation, — two women alone in a strange city, one of them about to die, apparently, — and she had them taken to her own house. Directly she came to understand the case, she sent for the proper person to treat it, — Dr. Dayton. Now you know all.”

"No, indeed, we do not! We should like to know next what Marion Kenneth is proposing to do, — besides refuse to accept sacrifices."

"She imposes sacrifice by the way she arranges her life. She pleads that she has no family history, — no genealogy, — that she belongs nowhere. What are these — what are all her misfortunes — but so many reasons why she should have protection, — reasons why the desire to cherish goes out to her all the more?" Dr. Beverley seemed rather to be reasoning with himself.

To his appeal Friend Merab made soft assenting sounds, while the doctor himself breathed a discouraged sigh, and let his eyes rest upon Rebecca, with a look which seemed to ask for sympathy, and Rebecca's own expression was one of so much sorrow that you might have said they were grieving alike, and for exactly the same thing.

But the regrets and longings that looked from eye to eye were far from being simple or well understood by either of these young people. We need to travel on a little and look back, in order to see clearly how things were in the morning.

"Let us not wait, — let us go to her at once!" said Friend Merab.

"The sight of you and Rebecca will be the medicine she needs," said Dr. Beverley, "but I am not sure she could bear it this evening."

“Is she ill, then?”

“She is worn out. There is no computing what the girl must have endured!”

“Ah, she does need me!” said Friend Merab, rising to go for her shawl, and although her lips trembled, and there were tears in her soft, gray eyes, the general effect of her expression was that of smiling rapture.

“There is this to be considered,” said Dr. Beverley; “she *must* sleep. The question is whether the pleasure would soothe or excite her.

“To be sure; we must think of that,” Friend Merab consented, with evident self-surrender.

And it was presently decided that the doctor should pay a visit to Columbus Avenue, and make his decision upon the report he got there.

“Ah,” said Merab, when he had gone, “who can tell? She might be willing to come to me! to accept my home as her own — and me as her own!” She pressed her little dry hand upon Rebecca’s, and looked up as a child might for some encouragement in hoping.

“Be *willing*!” Rebecca laughed out. “You are the angel, all unaware, for whom she is waiting, — the angel who will comfort her, and shelter her, and save her, and nurse her, and feed her; who will lie awake all night for her, and get up at dawn for her, and toil and moil through every hour of the day for her; who will

make all her clothes, and unmake all her woes, and be her mother and sister and all her lost relations rolled into one! There! will that suit you, dear?"

"Rebecca! I can hardly believe it!" said Merab, in a low, inward tone, and she directly fell into blissful reverie, sitting with her hands crossed, and her unseeing outward eyes fixed upon the buttons of the tufted yellow sofa, while Rebecca sat at a window and gave her attention to the passing, quite clearly visible by the hotel and street lights, — young women with their cavaliers going to laugh or weep at a play; carriages rolling up and away to carry people to all sorts of happiness; and she grumbled a little, that neither would the dear world return her affection, — accept her love, and be her own, — nor the one being who could have made her content to lose the whole world. She remembers to-day how she complained that she had not received, while dear Merab was wrapped in a dream of bliss because she might give. But she does not undertake to point out the degree of fitness, of justness, the merit or demerit of the shapes which happiness takes in our dreams.

Dr. Beverley brought back the report that Miss Kenneth was asleep, and he looked pleased, as a mother might in saying it of her ailing child. Merab, to hasten the coming of the



morrow, peradventure, soon wanted to say good night and go to her own sleep. She did withdraw to the adjoining room, but Rebecca lingered before the fire, with the poker in her hand, punctuating her thoughts by thrusts of it at the great lumps of coal in the grate, which cracked and sputtered responsively, and sent up new flashes of flame. Her cousin took a seat before the fire, too, and watched the performance and the performer thoughtfully, pushing his chair back a little as the flames waxed fiercer.

"I should like to analyze that pathetic look," he said presently,

"What pathetic look?" Rebecca asked, with her poker held out like a sceptre, which did not, however, give her an approachable aspect. "What pathetic look, I should like to know?"

"Your own."

"You don't understand my looks. I was thinking how many things will now come right."

"Many things?"

"Marion can live in peace, Friend Merab in bliss, and the rest of us in the exercise of our higher sympathetic powers."

"*You* will live in the exercise of your own joy-compelling powers — *always*."

"That sounds like the Odyssey."

"Well, it sounds like the truth. My first

thought was of you. My first hope was in you, Rebecca, for you stand on a mountain of gladness, ready to lift us all out of the depths we fall into. You can't be sorry without being glad; you" —

"I don't really care for these improvised fictions," Rebecca interposed, with a little sigh. "They're not half so interesting as the mildest magazine story."

"Oh, I'm not interesting; I'm only interested," her cousin responded. "Do tell me what you want to do with those coals!"

"Only to see them burn. There! I think the conflagration is at its height! Isn't it beautiful?" And Rebecca rested a little.

"It's very hot," said Dr. Beverley, mildly, giving another backward hitch to his chair.

"How vicious of me!" Rebecca cried. "Put that in my true biography, that I made people uncomfortable." She fell back into her chair a little wearily, perhaps, for in those terrible thrusts at the coals she had been giving battle to envy and jealousy, — two villains that she hated, — and resenting the offer of crumbs from a loaf which she regarded with hunger.

She presently turned a somewhat petulant face upon Dr. Beverley, and began, —

"Did you ever — But of course you never did!"

"I never did what?" Dr. Beverley asked, lifting his long azure eyes in calm wonder.

"Did you ever get outside yourself, and look down upon yourself, and *hate* yourself?"

"Good heavens, Rebecca! what ails you?"

"Nothing ails *me*; but what ailed the man who said that we can be perfectly aware of our imperfections and not be humiliated by the sight; and not only that, but that it is one of the noblest qualities of our nature that we are able so easily to dispense with greater perfection—in ourselves. *I* think it is one of our meanest qualities."

"Well, that depends. But we ought easily to dispense with what there is no call for. You're not in want of anything of that sort, Rebecca. You're perfect enough."

"Mercy! There's no such thing as having a little metaphysical conversation! How you do wander from the subject!"

"It does n't seem to me that I do."

"Yes, but you do; and let me tell you what Dr. Godwin told me, when he was talking to me about a cough, and I wanted to vary the topic a little."

"*Your* cough, Rebecca?"

"There you go again! He said that during the French Revolution there was a cartoon posted upon the walls in Paris in burlesque of

the policy of some general. It represented a farmer calling his flock of geese about him, telling them they were all about to be killed, and asking them what sauce they would like to be served with. The geese all cry, 'Ah! we don't want to be killed! We don't want to be killed!' '*Pardon, messieurs!*' says the farmer, '*Vous vous écarterez de la question.*' Not altogether apropos, and yet you reminded me of it."

"I'll live or die, as you may decree. I won't wander from *that* question, Rebecca. But tell me about that cough. You have never coughed in my presence."

"Why, I have n't any cough. I proved that to Dr. Godwin, — proved it clearly. He said I had a nervous cough, and must stop it. I told him I hoped one might say 'hem!' in the awkward pauses of conversation, without being accused of a cough."

"Why don't you come to me about these things, Rebecca?"

"About what things?"

"Do give me such opportunities as there are to care for you, — to do something for you. I shall abominate some man, some day, — the one to whom you give that privilege. I shall detest the next who discovers that you are a comfort and a blessing, — a cheerful light in a dark world. You" —

"There! now I know all about myself! Thanks! Tell me something about Marion."

"I should have come to that presently," Dr. Beverley said slowly. He could not change his topics with such rapidity. He gave his mental processes a moment for readjustment, and then continued: "Just now, poor child, she weeps constantly, and she must. She has all the tears of a short lifetime to shed. They will do her good. Still, they must have an end. You will lift her up."

"Friend Merab will."

"Oh, I praised heaven when I saw you had brought Friend Merab!"

"It was she who brought me."

"That was one of the hopes I rested upon you, Rebecca. I could not propose to Friend Merab that she should do me the favor to take Miss Kenneth home and take care of her for me, though I know her desire to do some such thing, but I thought that through you she might offer her protection, for a time at least. Miss Kenneth has no idea what she will do with herself. She proposes various impossibilities, but they all leave her friendless and alone. She is a wounded bird, that must be tenderly cherished, or it will die. Ah, if she would but listen to me!"

"She will — she surely will. Just now she



is grieving for her mother. She can't think of you."

"I only ask the right to protect her," Dr. Beverley answered quickly, with the manner of vindicating himself. "I efface myself in all but that."

"Yes, but don't you see — Oh dear, I wish she could discover a father!"

"A *father*! Pitiful Heaven! Don't mention the word!" Dr. Beverley, who was resting an elbow on his knee, started to an upright position, as if recoiling from a touch of the hot poker. "What kind of a father is she likely to have had? If there is such a person, he is to be dreaded."

"How do you know?"

"I won't give you my own opinion alone. The little doctress is acute, — she probed the mystery, — and she thinks this father was the evil Mrs. Kenneth feared."

"People in Mrs. Kenneth's condition have unreasonable fears."

"I can well suppose that her condition was the result of what she had suffered. Don't talk to me of a father! That is a horror that haunts me, — that some demon in the flesh may turn up. At some rate or other, I shall keep Miss Kenneth under my own eye. I *will* defend her, whether she consents or not. I'll be a father to her, if I can't be anything else."

“But are you sure” —

“Of what?”

“That you can’t be anything else?”

“I am surely bound to take Miss Kenneth’s word.”

“Oh, not *yet!*”

“I should not know how to proceed upon any other ground, Rebecca. If there is any object odious on the face of the earth, it is a man who insists that a woman shall surrender to him, whether she finds it agreeable or not.”

“Oh, I suppose so, — yes, — but your natural quietness may — well, it may — Some women expect more — more — *intensity*, perhaps you would call it.”

Rebecca stammered this out with renewed thrusts at the coals, and her face looked red and warm. Dr. Beverley received the delicate thrust at himself quite immovably.

“My rhapsodies must be forever unsung,” he responded. “I am one of the ‘voiceless’ when it comes to those things. If a man feels the depth and truth of what he is saying, these fulminations of intensity seem belittling. Excess in any form is an unpleasant condition.”

Ah, this sorry Dr. Beverley! There were some things he didn’t understand even in himself. It was, however, Rebecca’s opinion that, he being set aside, there was but a poor range

of objects remaining for those who had affections to bestow.

"Hm!" she ejaculated, "I wonder what use Miss Kenneth expects to make of her difficult affections?"

"She told me."

"She *did*? Could you tell me?"

"There is something else — some one else."

"*Some one else!* Dear me! Who?"

"She means to reserve her life — her affection — for — who do you think?"

"It is impossible to think."

"For that hideous myth, — her father."

"Is it another mania?"

"Oh, 'a monotonous world can afford to be lenient to people with a slight craziness,' and it may be true, as it has been said, that everybody is mad, — that it would be a new form of madness not to be mad, and that it is only other people's manias which seem madness to ourselves, but as they do seem so, we naturally discourage them. I could n't bear that Miss Kenneth should get this unhappy notion fixed upon her, and I told her that, after all those years, when no father had made his appearance, there was not likely to be such a person in existence. I may have been wrong, for the poor delusion seemed to brace her a little, and, by the way, it was called up by some wandering words of her mother's, in her last hours."

“What were the words?”

“I don’t know. Some affectionate, self-ac-cusing cry, not unnatural under any circumstances in a gentle-hearted woman. But Miss Kenneth believes it to have been absolute proof that her father was a saint and a sufferer. I want to save her, especially from this possible or impossible father, and her heritage of wrongs.”

Other desires appeared to fall back into rank, marshaled by the crowning masculine instinct, — the instinct of true manhood, — a yearning to protect something weak.

“Ah, you do love!” Rebecca murmured, musing perplexedly, and she added, to herself: “But is it, perchance, the amelioration of the human lot, the improvement of the social order, the defense of the helpless that you love?” for it seemed that there would have been some subtle difference if Dr. Beverley had simply loved the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

With an abrupt movement she resigned the poker, forsook the fire, and directly bade good-night to her cousin, for she perceived with consternation that the road to delusion was wide open to her again.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### BRINGING HOME THE PRIZE.

THE Bostonians, a law unto themselves, forbid themselves to be eager, but they have no civil ordinance prohibiting the introduction of a little foreign ardor into Boston; so the chill atmosphere of that superlative city was quite moderated the next morning by the warmth some simple souls had brought into its borders. What with that, and saturant sunshine, a great show of soft spring snow, which had fallen during the night, was dripping from ledges and eaves, sliding from roofs and gables, dropping in woolly balls and diamond drops from the trees on Commonwealth Avenue, and there was a large run on the banks that had established themselves on the leeward side of the way, by the time Dr. Beverley and his friends were ready to start for Columbus Avenue. There was no place for a tidy little Quakeress to step without splashing her immaculate skirts, which had never known spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

“Shall we take a carriage?” she asked, turn-



ing from the window, where she had been taking a shrinking survey of the pasty sidewalks and crossings.

"By all means," Dr. Beverley replied, and so impatience and fastidiousness were served together, and they were soon at the door of a house on Columbus Avenue, which bore the announcement that there dwelt Dr. Phebe Carnes.

The merest monad of a professional being was Dr. Phebe physically, and it must be true, as some people believe, that the soul is the investiture of the body, for the doctor's soul could never have been squeezed into that tiny frame of hers: it was quite too large and lofty, and must have been the medium through which the body was seen; for although the latter was extremely plain indeed, you directly began to think of it as admirable.

She was an alert, visible concentration of energy, with hair drawn back, *à la Chinoise*, so tightly that it seemed to pull the skin of the forehead and the eyelids along with it. When Dr. Beverley presented his friends to her, this state of things was securely fixed by a close bonnet, which was pure in its intention to be simply a head covering and no vain ornament, and something corresponding to that rational intention was diffused over the whole woman.

She lifted her face in addressing Dr. Bever-

ley, as an earnest little pullet might in swallowing a draught of water, and asked him to listen to some things she had to say to him, while Merab and Rebecca made their visit to her guest upstairs.

Ah, that poor little guest! When the waiting woman pushed the door open, and stood aside for her visitors to enter, there she was, in a severe-looking room, where the *dulce* was altogether overwhelmed by the *utile* again, for Dr. Carnes's main intention was over it all, and her house as plain as a hospital. In an ugly, broad, high-backed, tabular-armed, splint-bottomed, splint-backed, factory-made rocking chair Marion Kenneth sat bending forward expectantly, her eyes fixed intently upon the door,—her heavy eyes, with the red, swollen lids. A glare of sun-sharpened daylight, as it fell upon her, gave a withered tone to her face, and she was scarcely more than a faded memory of the girl who had collected such brilliant forces a few months before. She was in the same blue gown, with everything else quite different; her smiles all gone; her motive, her plan of life, her bright courage, her occupation gone; a being altogether detached from a world in which she seemed to have been left by mistake, waiting—waiting in bewilderment and dread for the great void to unfold itself.

Rebecca stood aside for an instant, like a person *de trop*, while Merab advanced, half fearfully, half triumphantly, to appropriate the prize. It was her love-beaming face and outstretched arms that caused Marion to struggle for an impossible smile, but it was the clasp of those arms, and the wet cheek against her own, that broke the seal of the inexhaustible tears again. Merab let her own tears drop from her faded pink cheeks and stain her fresh new bonnet strings, with surprising abandon.

So quiet and simple was the form of taking possession. Scarcely a word was spoken, but all was understood as completely, as finally, as the first clasp, the first kiss of a lover.

It was indeed but a moment that Rebecca allowed to the grave, sweet ceremony, for her impatience was great, and while Merab still held Marion's shadow in her short, plump arms, she swept upon them both, — clasped them and held them together in her long, scrawny ones, — and so the three stood for a minute, each embracing the other two, and each furnishing her quota of tears, you may depend.

"I have, after all, so many friends," said poor Marion.

"No one has a right to expect more than one, in a world of this size and after this plan, so the philosophers would tell you, Marion," said

Rebecca, "and you have at least four, of the first order, under this very roof."

They put her into the ugly chair again, and sat down on either side, leaning on either arm of it, and more to their own satisfaction than it would be to the reader of this page, unfolded and interchanged their sympathies and emotions.

Meantime the two doctors down below were progressing in a conversation which, years after, was repeated to Rebecca in minute detail by Dr. Phebe herself.

"You will tell me I am *too* deeply interested in these matters," Dr. Phebe was saying, "for now I am going to speak of something that is none of my business."

Dr. Beverley raised his eyes slowly, and opened them a trifle wider upon his interlocutor, (she would not like that we should say interlocutress), who continued: "I am one of those detestable persons who 'feel it their duty;' I expect you to be angry; I am prepared for it."

Dr. Beverley, raising his chin a little, still waited. He owed at least patience to the good little Samaritan.

"*Don't* fix your mind — or, in the common phrase, your heart — upon that girl!" she at length besought him. "I have watched her — studied her — since last November. I know her as if I had made her. She is a mere illus-

tration of the filial instinct, — pure, simple, unadulterated, — as Père Goriot is of the paternal. Everything else is left out. There is nothing there to make a wife of. She is — to speak exhaustively — the incarnation of one idea.”

“To me, she is the incarnation of what I much desire,” Dr. Beverley answered, with gentle allowance.

“You desire but little, then, unless to make a sacrificial offering.”

“It may be I can judge better of that myself.”

“Well — There ! that’s all. I’m so foolish as to suppose I can set things right by my advice. Excuse the conceit.”

“If the advice were only as excellent as the motive which prompts it !”

“The only excellence is that of the opportunity I have had for knowing all about this matter. The interdependence between her mother and herself was the systole and diastole of that girl’s existence. Since it is at an end, there is no real life remaining. What you see is the last mechanical working of a machine that is run down. Yes, I am cruel, but you are more cruel to yourself ; and as a physician, you are inconsistent ” —

“But, my dear lady, pray understand that I have n’t the faintest hope. I believe in the impossibility of what I wish.”



“Bah! Impossibility! In six weeks she will marry you from gratitude and weakness of will. Oh, you have courage!” Dr. Carnes exclaimed, rising to her four feet ten inches of height, and surveying Dr. Beverley with the pitiful look which she would have bestowed upon an instance of abnormal development in an infant. “If there is anything which gravitates towards folly more than feminine youth, it is masculine youth,” she added with slow, judicial consideration.

“I perceive a law of necessity,” Dr. Beverley returned, following her example and rising too.

“You don’t perceive the right one.”

“My dear lady,” — Dr. Beverley transferred his hat to his left hand, and laid his statement down slowly upon the crown of it with some emphatic pats of his right, — “my dear lady, I know the map of Massachusetts, and I know that the road I wish to take is not the road to a boy’s paradise. It is, however, the road I wish to take.”

He bent forward, looking down the long distance at Dr. Phebe with compressed, half-smiling lips, and a look of unshaken purpose in his soft blue eyes.

She returned the look with one of studious contemplation, and a grave, prophetic answer. “You’ll be rescued,” she said. “The omens

are good. You'll be saved!" and so turned away to her office, leaving Dr. Beverley to examine the progressive movements of the time, through the pamphlets on her table, the condition of the avenue and its passengers, or, if he pleased, himself, while he waited.

The doctor apparently chose the latter pastime, for by and by, when Friend Merab came downstairs to present her intentions to him, he was found sunken into the depths of another ugly chair, with his legs stretched out to their uttermost capacity, and an introverted gaze fastened upon vacancy, or it may be upon the place recently vacated by Dr. Carnes.

"Could we take her home to-day?" asked Merab eagerly.

"There could be nothing better," Dr. Beverley returned, rising with the alacrity of a man ready for action. "Bless you, Friend Merab! You're an angel of mercy!"

"I'm a very glad and thankful woman," said Merab. "There's a noon train. Would that be making too much haste?"

"That is for you to decide. The sooner the better for Miss Kenneth."

There was little packing to be done for Marion. Her few belongings Rebecca put together in ten minutes, and Dr. Carnes, to speed the parting guest, whose coming she had so benefi-

cently welcomed, ordered luncheon at eleven o'clock, so that there was nothing to be done, in preparation for departure, but that Dr. Beverley should return to the hotel, and come back with a carriage and the bags, in time for the twelve o'clock train.

Dr. Carnes, who visited the gravest cases among her patients in the early morning, went out and returned from seeing the comfortable sufferers, so as to be present at the departure. She offered a little advice to everybody in making her adieux, — to everybody excepting Dr. Beverley, — considering him, perhaps, already well furnished. But she was heard to say to him, as he took Marion's shawl from her hands : —

“ I 'm pleased with a clairvoyant view I have had. There is an overruling Providence, after all. You 'll be saved ! ”

At twelve o'clock Miss Kenneth, with a bunch of English violets in her hand, rolled out of Boston attended by her retinue of slaves, who adjusted blinds, adjusted wraps, adjusted the ventilation, adjusted their own looks and tones, all with reference to her, and at two o'clock she entered the sweet old Quaker home, where the very coming of the day and night were henceforth to be adjusted with reference to her.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DRAGGING ANCHOR.

Is it not the serenest moment — the moment of seeming security — in which calamity falls? — when one says, for instance, “No disaster has ever happened on this road ; this is a very safe route.”

It was thus with my poor aunt. Sitting by her own sunny window reading the promises, indulging in comforting reflections, enjoying the assured faith that God himself had delivered her out of the hands of the enemy, and the assured hope that He would continue to reckon her among his favorites, aunt Maria saw a carriage draw up at Merab Austen’s door, and directly there alighted from it, first, her only son ; then Merab ; then the enemy !

Let us not dwell upon the tragic things of life, however. Let us not look upon my aunt in her despair. It will be enough to say that all the shades were pulled down on that side of the house, and aunt Maria saw neither Merab Austen, nor her house, nor her manservant, nor her

maidservant, nor the young woman that was within her gates, for a long time.

But the young woman did not miss her. What she did miss was so important a part of life that nothing else was of consequence. Not all Merab's most studious efforts resulted in reaching the agony of need which she suffered.

Merab thought she understood it well, but she was as widely removed from that experience of necessity which one only object could relieve, as she was from the narrow scope of affection which gave the limit to necessity. She did not at all understand that the lack was one which she and all her resources could never even mitigate.

To Marion, everything remained unchanged after Merab had emptied her cupboards and drawers of their exquisite and odorous contents, and spread them in room after room — especially in Marion's own room — to brighten and adorn the sober old home for her; and after she had stripped her beloved greenhouse of all its blossoming things, disposing them in cheerful groups and ranks wherever Marion's eyes would be likely to rest upon them, for Marion's eyes *never* rested upon them. They were fixed upon the past, and wandered from that only to gaze with longing upon a wild vision of an impossible new temple, where she could set up the one other idol that her religion allowed, and be again a



blessed even if a tortured devotee. The deprivation, the uncertainty, the mystery, the fear, the absolute servitude, from which her spirited youth had once seemed to appeal to its right of freedom and joy, were conditions into which she would willingly have returned from the horror of emptiness in which her freedom was found to consist. Given all the reasonable conditions for perpetual contentment, it seemed easy, sometimes, to be exasperated with a girl who would not be content, whose smiles were only efforts painful to be seen. The way in which she had borne her mother's griefs, and carried her sorrows, offered no ground for judging how she would bear her own.

Still, she was created to be glad, Dr. Godwin said. It was impossible for a girl of her keen senses and receptive temperament to remain always crushed, always apathetic. Her spirits would return with her physical strength.

And Dr. Godwin added himself to the retinue of slaves. He was perpetually dropping in to make her a visitation, as he called it, and he insisted that she should take a drive with him daily.

Morris Beverley aspired to the same privilege, — that of driving Miss Kenneth out, — but a look which she raised to the keen eyes of her elder adorer, when that variation of routine was

proposed, gave him a clear understanding of the situation, and he practiced cunning devices to thwart his young rival. Morris was extremely patient, however. After that futile chase across the continent, to have his love inside the next door, where he could watch over her with delightful anxiety, seemed to content him. With no more serious rivals than the old doctor and an improbable, indefinite father, he seemed to luxuriate in the supreme joy of loving hopelessly. It was evidently a satisfaction to him to gaze at the outside of Merab Austen's house ; to watch for glimpses of Marion at the windows ; to run in, in passing, to snatch the moments and frequently hours of possession, which a chair near Marion's by the fireside seemed to give him.

But seemingly unconscious of the emotions she engendered in numerous breasts, wrapped in her own unconfessed thoughts, Marion Kenneth's life went feebly on. Dr. Godwin's prophecy that her spirits would return with her physical strength was strangely the reverse of what really did happen. It soon came to be perceived that her physical strength was not returning. Its small remainder was, rather, departing — slowly — slowly — almost imperceptibly — still, very surely. There were days in which a wild reassurance seemed to possess her — feverish days

— when her strength became suddenly marvellous; and these were followed by other days of passive melancholy, when she simply pined and faded.

The reasons for these variations were in her own secret consciousness. Never by chance did she drop a word which gave a hint of what was going on there, and when, at length, her life had wasted to that degree where the drives were given up, and the seat by the fire exchanged for a place on the couch in Merab's sitting-room, and each day marked some new relinquishment, it was then that Dr. Godwin's prophecy was reversed, and her spirits did return. The feverish days came no more — nor the days of melancholy. She was evenly placid and cheerful. The spontaneous smile returned, and where she had hitherto seemed wrapped in unconsciousness of it all, she now noted with warmth of gratitude each trifling kindness bestowed upon her. The choicest delicacies, prepared by Merab's own hands, had previously been tasted with no perception of what they were. Now they were appreciated and lauded, and Merab was blessed and made happy. Dr. Godwin and Dr. Beverley were received with an equally warm and open welcome. It may be that the cordial recognition enjoyed by the latter was the more pronounced. Everything was on a new footing.

In spite of this more cheerful appearance, it was evidently difficult for Dr. Godwin to keep up the air of badinage with which he had been wont to say: "What! you promised me a better pulse to-day! Very well, I know a man who is not to be deluded and trifled with. If this obstinacy continues I shall send for him;" or, "That other medical man will be here presently, and then we shall see."

But Marion, with perfect indifference, continued to grow weaker and more placid. One evening, when she rose to go upstairs, she faltered and sat down again, with an uncertain, half-smiling look, leaning a little forward, as if she meant to start anew presently. Dr. Beverley, who morning, noon, or night might have been found by the couch in Merab's sitting-room, saw the difficulty. "Let me carry you!" he said, bending over her with the tenderness of a seraph and the capable arms of a strong young man.

"I'm so tired! Thank you," Marion responded, smiling up at him, and the powerful arms gathered up what was little more than a spirit, and hovering it, as he carried it, like a mother, against his breast, he set it down gently on its own couch upstairs.

"You've been very good to — us," said Marion, detaining him with a tremulous touch, and Morris, already stooping low, dropped upon his knee and kissed her hands.

"You will never understand how grateful I am," she added, and as he raised his face she touched her lips lightly to his forehead. "But *that* you understand," she went on, distinctly and sweetly. "It is to say good-by."

"My love, my love!"

"No, no; you are mistaken," she said quickly, putting all that aside with a grave gesture. "I seem to see everything so clearly now. I have made you *think* of love, — through pity, or something like that, — but wait until you understand yourself better, and then — remember this. Will you?"

"Remember! A — h!"

"And look carefully to find the one you do love, and the one who loves you."

She started and turned at a sound. The gas was low, and the farther end of the anteroom in shadow.

"Who is there? Rebecca, is that you?"

"I thought I was plainly enough to be seen," said Rebecca. "I came up with you to bring the shawls and things, and to help you a little. I thought you saw me, or heard me."

Morris, undisturbed, pressed the transparent hands to his lips once more, and rising slowly, as if to prolong the moment, bent again and kissed her hair where it wandered in soft, shining filaments on her brow, murmuring blessings and



good-night, and then went away in a state of sublimated rapture which was a precipitation of poetic sorrow.

Then Rebecca fell down in the place he had left, and clasped Marion in a long, silent embrace, which said so much that words would have been poor by comparison.

The next evening, when Rebecca took her hat to go to Merab's, aunt Maria's paramount grievance, which she nursed with as much assiduity as was given to the nursing of the dear invalid, broke into such expression as language affords. It was not that she wanted her family constantly with her, — quite the contrary. It was a vaster want, — the want of a soul to be the centre of its own universe, towards which and around which all things should gravitate and revolve : not at all a rare instance among souls.

Aunt Maria's incontinent address was hardly of consequence, yet Rebecca herself suffered a painful, vicarious humiliation on account of it, as she stood looking at her hat, twisting it about, and taking a view of it upon all sides, while she waited for the final period. The premises were numerous, and all of an accusative nature ; accusative of her own household and of the girl who, she foresaw, would presently have a throne set up for her in aunt Maria's own house, — or what she was so assuming as to call her own.

The conclusion was that she, aunt Maria, would like things otherwise — everybody saw that — — but mercy!

Partly for lack of further power of expression, and partly because Dr. Godwin's step was heard in the hall, she finished abruptly. She had sent for medical help, just as she sent up prayers to heaven, because of habit, and because there was so little else one could do in times of hopeless, complicated suffering.

At sound of the doctor's approach, she let the spark which she blew and fanned to warm up the scene dwindle quite away again. She had an entirely separate manner for him, and she put it on with a casual ease that was admirable.

The doctor appeared with his lips tightly set, and his face almost purple in an effort at repression. He came in without a word, and for an unusual event sat directly down. His manner filled Rebecca with alarm.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's lamentable! That's what it is!" the doctor answered hoarsely. "She won't live another two weeks, and not a vestige of disease about her."

It appeared that he had just been in to see Marion, and was speaking of her. That was easily understood.

Silence followed his words, during which the

wind sighed heavily through a half-open window.

Rebecca did not care to see the expression of aunt Maria's face. She turned her own face to the window, and considered the rising planet Mars, which looked in from between the opposite houses. The fall of footsteps in the street had a bold, intrusive sound. They came to the front door, and presently a voice was heard asking for Dr. Godwin.

The doctor made the usual examination of aunt Maria's case, said she had no occasion for concern about herself, advised a continuance of his last prescription, and departed, leaving his patient wrapped in meditative calm.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE NEW DOCTOR.

THE next morning it was June again, — the first day of June.

As I threw open my shutters and let in its glorious light, at six o'clock in the morning, and leaning out breathed its intoxicating odors, I was conscious of an aversion to regions where there would be no more sea, for the breath of the sea was sweet. I felt immortal, and it seemed barbarous that I should have managed somehow to be so full of life, so abundantly furnished with keen senses which made mere empty living an acute delight, when within that house lying in silence just across the lawn, an exquisite creature lay dying, — a creature without disease, without need to die.

It has been said by some tired unfortunate that life itself is a disease. All the weariness of threescore years and ten might, however, be compressed into eighteen years, and then —

I leaned upon the window-sill, and watched Absalom trying to trim the turf with a sickle,

so that the peace of the waning life might not be disturbed by the noise of the lawn-mower. A robin dropped from an elm-tree, and boldly skimmed in broken stages across the grass, unafraid of the old gardener and his sickle, so conscious, so vainglorious was he of his power to fly. His melodious boasting reverberated from the silent walls. He shook his wings and scattered drops of dew. The morning smiled. Yet we had been forewarned that it was one of the last for Marion.

Not only the morning smiled, but even aunt Maria was more complacent and accommodating. She allowed herself to look out of the south windows once more. She put up some of the shades and let in the sunshine, and read for her morning lesson selections from the one hundred and thirty-sixth Psalm.

Since she was again to be delivered from the enemy, and this time finally and forever, she discovered in that first day of June an occasion for gratitude. Not professedly, of course, and perhaps the ground of her gratulation was not even self-acknowledged. What pious soul, since the days of King David, has said unto itself that it is glad its neighbor has fallen? Our neighbor falls and we are glad, but we say that summer has come; that the weather agrees with us; that the word of God sustains us.



Considering his depression of the night before, it appeared remarkable that Dr. Godwin should make his appearance at half past eight that morning, with something of his old liveliness in his manner.

“Come, come, put away those teacups!” he said to me, when he launched himself upon the house. “Eternal doom! Are you always wiping teacups and counting spoons? Worcester ware? I don’t care if they are New Jerusalem ware. Get them out of the way! And Rebecca, go over as soon as possible and stay with little Marion. Get her ready to see a visitor, and stay by her. Don’t leave her! You always brace her up, and — ah — I’m going to bring another doctor in this morning. You may tell her so. I’ve threatened, you know, and now — we’ll try it — we’ll see. I won’t go in myself just now, for I’m a little — ah — noisy and blustering, you see. *Nervous?* Not a bit of it! How dare you say that word to my face, miss! Coffee too strong. That’s all. I shall be in at eleven o’clock with my associate. Keep her quiet. Don’t let her be disturbed. Don’t let her get excited. You know how. I’m a little afraid — and yet” —

Dr. Godwin seemed to have drunk something stronger than coffee. He had a tipsy manner.

Aunt Maria made no objection to the doctor’s

proposal, and magnanimously loaned her cheerer to the fallen enemy without any grumbling.

The enemy looked newly risen, rather than fallen, — as sweet as a white hyacinth caught in a spring snow-drift, — as she lay smiling placidly in an exquisite atmosphere when I entered.

The “centennial things” made her surroundings almost sumptuous, and contrasted curiously with the primary simplicity of the room. The Turkish rugs were there, and soft, embroidered blue covers from China on the bureau and table. There were boxes of ivory, ornamented with silver filagree work, from Norway, and bottles of fine Bohemian glass exhaling rose odors. There was a lacquered screen from Japan, and brass and copper ornaments, returning the shine of the June morning, which was softened for the eyes of the invalid by blue linings under the plain muslin curtains. There were Doulton jugs, Venetian glasses, and set among them was Marion, smiling, as has been said, smiling and waiting for — she knew not what. (Who knows what one is waiting for, a few days before the last?) Her hair looked brighter than ever, contrasted with the whiteness of her face and the darkness of her eyes. We kept it brushed back, and twisted upon the top of her head, that it might not trouble her, and it looked like a crown of dark old gold.

Merab was wrapping her shoulders in a shawl, for, in spite of the blaze on the hearth and the June sunshine, Marion was cold.

"She ought to wear her fine sacque to-day," I said. "And look at these — smell them. The first roses, from Absalom, with his humble worship."

We spoke slowly and quietly to her.

When she had sniffed at the true, old-fashioned, rose-colored roses, and given her thanks to be returned to Absalom, and said she was glad it was June, — the month when she had come, — knowing she was thinking it would be the month in which she would go, too, I moved away, that I might not give encouragement to the thought by sorrowful looks.

"Shall I bring out the queen's ermine?" I asked.

"Thee means the sacque? Yes, do," Merab answered. "That will be better. A shawl is troublesome."

So I brought out of the wardrobe drawer a down-lined, lace-trimmed sacque, of creamy Canton stuff, that Merab and I had gotten up together for Marion to receive in, when she could not sit up.

"But why am I to come out in full dress so early in the morning?" asked Marion.

"Well, it is the first day of June, to begin

with, — a day which comes but once a year, — and such a one as this, but once in many years,” said the second maid of honor. “Then, again, Dr. Godwin may bring some one.”

“To see me? Why — who?”

“Well, he thinks of bringing in another doctor.”

“Another doctor! I wish he would n’t! Are n’t two doctors enough? — two of the best?”

“They want to see what a third will do.”

“What *can* he do?”

“That remains to be seen.”

“Ah, well!”

She said no more. It was only the slight impatience of one about to start, who chafes at useless hindrance.

But Merab was elated with additional hopes. She had never been without hope. The long, late spring had been trying to everybody, and it was not strange, in her opinion, that a slight, worn thing, like Marion, should be pulled far down by it. Marion’s accession of spirits was also deceptive, and now that there was to be an imported doctor, hope rose to high-water mark. Dr. Godwin had repeatedly said there was no disease, and three learned heads together would surely think of the right tonic for a well but weary girl.

“We’ll prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, my dear,” she said.

"That will be your own self," Marion responded, twisting her head a little to kiss the hand which was drawing on the sacque, while I supported her.

Merab lingered in fastening it, and then trotted serenely away. It seemed cruel that she had never been told.

"Do they really think it's of any use, Rebecca?" said Marion, laying her roses aside with a sigh, when the sound of Merab's footsteps had died away.

"What?"

"Trying to make me live."

"It seems so."

"I assure you it is not."

A pause, and no response.

"I'm too eager to set out on my voyage of discovery — to find what really belongs to me — to know all — everything — at length. You can't think how I have wished to know!"

Another silent pause.

"I wish they would let me sail away. I dream of setting out — and there is always some one in my dream — O Rebecca!"

Her lips quivered as she smiled, which gave a look of tender rapture to her spiritual face.

"I haven't been able to speak of this — to urge my wish — with the others who care for me — who love me so kindly. It might pain them



— it might seem like ingratitude. But you understand, don't you, Rebecca? And if it could be managed so that I might have an opportunity to speak to the new doctor quite alone, I would tell him just the truth, and beg him to advise Dr. Godwin to let me go. There is that good in his coming — I can tell him — and he won't care. Try to get me this opportunity, will you, Rebecca?"

I promised.

At precisely eleven o'clock, the well-known rat-a-tat of Dr. Godwin's horse was heard in the street. He seemed to be of one mind with his master, — to take his impetus, his impatience, his fractiousness, his gentle moods, all magnetically from the impetuous, impatient, fractious, but gentle soul who guided him. He dashed up to the door nervously, and stood fretting while the two doctors alighted. It was a young, almost boyish figure that stepped lightly down after Dr. Godwin, instead of the elderly one to have been expected of a man whose experience would have made him a becoming coefficient of the rarely skillful old practitioner who was deferring to him.

They exchanged no words, and the senior counselor made a short ceremony of introducing his junior to Merab in the parlor doorway, before he brought him up.

Marion waited calmly meantime. Nothing troubled her, though she was apparently curious to see the man to whom she meant to appeal. Much depends upon the presence of one to whom we would offer a prayer.

Their footsteps were on the stairs. Marion's eyes were fixed with a look of quiet interest upon the open doorway. A quick, sharply measured, marching step followed the familiar heavier tramp through the upper hall, and presently Dr. Godwin bowed into the room "Dr. Richardson," a lithe, dark-skinned man, whose steady, dark-gray eyes went straight to the patient. And remained there. I don't think he knew there was another person in the room, so that I had full liberty to look at him at leisure, and to think that his plain, delightfully attractive face would have been a fine model for a study to be called *Courageous Manhood*. And it seemed to be a clear exponent of the excellent quality called common sense, too. The features, large and strong, would have helped to express or enforce authority and elicit obedience; yet, in spite of a vigorous moustache, the mouth was revealed in an exquisite softening of expression, as he advanced towards the fragile little patient, whose life a slight shock would have swept away, as wind sweeps a blossom from the bough.

He sat down sideways by the bed, so as to be

*vis-à-vis* to Marion, and simply looked at her in silence. It is a way some physicians have, — an unpleasant way, it seems to me. It made me nervous. But Dr. Godwin set a steady, quiet stream of remark slowly flowing through the chasm of Dr. Richardson's silence, and his loquacity was of the sort that would cheer and soothe his patient, rather than weary her.

“You see, Miss Marion,” he said, “Dr. Richardson wonders to find shut up here a girl who might be running in the garden if she pleased. I make the best of it. I tell him we're an economical people. We're economizing you. We keep you where we can have all there is of you. You may tell him a different story if you like. As to this economizing tendency, doctor, you'll understand how it's rooted in us when I tell you of an old lady of my acquaintance here who wanted a new teapot. She heard that teapots were selling cheap over at Smith's Mills, so she hired a conveyance and drove to the Mills and bought her teapot, at a reduction of some few pennies, and came home proud of her bargain. But, behold! the cheap teapot had an obstruction of the spout. It wouldn't pour; so she hired another equipage and went back and changed it, to her perfect satisfaction. If there's any application wanted, I'm the article that needed to be changed, and so forth. Also we haven't man-

aged Miss Kenneth much better than Mrs. Wringer managed her purse. There is n't, after all, so much left of her as there ought to be. Hey?"

"What there is must bring compound interest at a large per cent. at once," said Dr. Richardson, reaching forward to lay his fingers on Marion's wrist.

"Will you take the loan?" Dr. Godwin proposed.

"Miss Kenneth must be allowed some choice in the matter," answered his colleague, with a singular appearance of diffidence. "Will you consent to be loaned to me, Miss Kenneth?"

"Well—yes," Marion responded, after an instant of consideration.

The new doctor spread his long fingers over Marion's little shadowy hand, shutting it all up in his own, and held it so, looking away for a minute, testing its temperature, or the degree of vitality it indicated, probably.

"We'll draw up the papers presently," said Dr. Godwin. "You'll find me downstairs, doctor, when you're ready; I have a word to say to Miss Austen."

I went away with him to find Merab, and so, without the least difficulty, Marion was furnished with the opportunity to make her appeal to the new doctor.

I was promptly remanded by Dr. Godwin, however, but lingered in the adjoining room after my return, moving about busily, displacing and replacing things, to give Marion a sense of my companionship without intruding upon her opportunity. I heard the two voices diligently speaking and responding, like the voices of friends. There was nothing in the tone of Marion's which indicated that she was pleading for a chance to die. It sounded, rather, as if she were having a charming conversation, and enjoying it. It lasted for some twenty minutes — it seemed longer — and then there was a movement. Dr. Richardson was going. I stood where I could look over my shoulder and give a glance at him. They were shaking hands. A smile began in Dr. Richardson's eyes and spread until his whole face was transfigured, like landscape under a gradual gleam of sunshine, and Marion, looking up at him, reflected the gleam, as the east reflects the brightness of the west.

"Shall you come again?" she asked.

And he answered, "Yes. Good-by."

"Good-by."

And he was instantly gone.

Then I went directly in to Marion. She looked gently exhilarated, and held her roses, smelling them deeply, with a satisfaction that seemed to come from the common physical sense.



"Will you put them in water, please? I hate to see them drooping," she said, looking at them and touching them as if they were conscious objects of neglect, that might dread to lose their sweet, short lives.

The doctors were talking with Merab in the parlor below. Their voices came up cheerfully. As I filled a vase with water and arranged the roses in it, I said: "Well, you had a capital chance to entreat the new doctor."

"Y — es."

"Did he agree?"

"You mean" —

"To let you go on your voyage of discovery?"

"Oh, I did n't ask him."

"I took pains to give you the fullest opportunity."

"I know it. Thank you."

"How came you to waste it?"

"I don't know. Let me think."

She shut her eyes, half smiling.

"There! You're tired. We must n't talk any more."

"*Tired!* Not the least in the world. I want to talk. Let me see. In the first place — Is n't he beautiful, Rebecca?"

"Why, he did n't strike me as a beauty. He looks as if he had grown up in shoulder-braces and swallowed the poker, — his chest is thrown

out and his shoulders moved back to that extent, and his whole aspect so severely upright."

"Oh, I don't mean his looks exactly." A pause. "Rebecca, he made me feel ashamed. I would n't have had him know what I said to you this morning. I think he would have called it weak and wicked." Another, longer pause. "And when he shut his hand over mine, it seemed so strong — so alive — that I felt how good it was to be strong and alive. Some persons impart such an influence. I've heard of a man whose presence imparted a flavor to rice." She smiled.

"Perhaps it was he."

"Oh, it was."

"He has imparted some new quality to you," I said, looking upon her with interest that was largely tinctured with curiosity and wonder.

"He made me see, quite suddenly, what a glorious gift life is, and how base it is to undervalue it. He said something like that to me, Rebecca, and I felt disgraced. He must have known my very thoughts. He told me things that I might do with my life; and he said that he had once wished to part with his own, — I would like to know why, — but that he came at length to feel, as he hoped I would feel, that he had no right to think lightly of it. He told me we were left to guard positions, and that we

would be culpable — be deserters — sort of traitors, you know, — if we left them without positive orders. He talked rather severely, Rebecca, and yet kindly — very kindly.”

She lay with her eyes closed for a few minutes, and then said : —

“ I made some excuses. I told him about my mother. But I assured him that, even after she had gone, I had not wished to die, because of a hope that I had a father. I told him how I had always longed for a father, — that it had been my dream of joy, — and you can’t believe how he seemed to sympathize with me, Rebecca. I told him that it was only when I had been obliged to give up that hope that I had wished to die. Why was I obliged to give it up? he asked me then; and I told him some of Dr. Beverley’s arguments, — but it was n’t those, after all. It was that I kept dreaming, — I told him even that, Rebecca, as if I must needs empty my heart, — I said that I had constantly dreamed of some one coming for me, to take me away. I could never see his face, for it was always dark, but he called me his child, and we always found my mother. Then I knew my father had died, and I wished to die, — to have the lovely dream come true, — and I was never so happy as when I began to believe that time was drawing near. Well, do you know, Rebecca, he told me he did

not think I need interpret my dream in that way. He destroyed all Dr. Beverley's arguments, and said that, if there was ever a significance in dreams, my dream might mean that my father would come to me alive, — *alive*, Rebecca! He wanted me to think of that.

“ ‘Then,’ said I, ‘if there *is* such a hope, I *must* live, for *I do want my father!* He must not come and find me gone!’ ”

“ Well, I suppose it is difficult to prescribe for a father-sick girl. I'm afraid that is a malady which has not been considered in medical science, Rebecca. He shut his lips tightly, as if reflecting what could be done about it, and all the while I was praying that he might be able to help me, and feeling a wild hope that he could, — a preposterous hope, Rebecca, I feel it now, — when he turned to me and said, in a tone which was like a command, yet it was a tone I liked, Rebecca, ‘Let me hear you say, “*I will live!*” ’ and I spoke so promptly that I surprised myself. ‘*I will live!*’ said I, and I meant it. So you see I have something to do, dear Rebecca. And now — may I begin by going to sleep? I'm like that woman Friend Merab tells about, who had so much to do she did n't know where to begin, but she decided to go and take a nap first, and have *that* done with.”

She went to sleep smiling.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A SINGULAR LOVE AFFAIR.

A NEW tendency manifested itself directly, in the attention she gave to things cheerful and comfortable and purely terrestrial, and in the decided interest in breakfasts and dinners which developed. She had heretofore only feigned to partake of these repasts, but on the second day of June our ethereal maiden asked for more cocoa, and grossly turned to thoughts of beef-steak, with the common inclination and intention of the savage. When I dressed her lovely hair on the second day of June, as I often did, for it was the one thing in which Merab was awkward and unsuccessful, she talked of the weather, the odors from the garden, the notes of the birds, and admired some of the things in the room, which I suppose she had never before heeded.

I heard no more about the voyage of discovery. That was indefinitely and cheerfully postponed. But whatever conversation we fell into on that morning seemed to have a miraculous tendency to sweep in and carry along Dr. Rich-



ardson, so that I felt, in a certain sense, that I was making a voyage of discovery myself.

"He is n't in the least like anybody else, is he, Rebecca?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The doctor."

"Which doctor?"

"Oh, the new one."

"Well, I don't know," I said, tucking in the last hairpin and giving a few lingering touches to the silky hair for love of it; "it seems to me that all fairly agreeable men have the same tendency to lurk in somebody's fancy or other."

"Why, whose fancy does *he* lurk in? Not yours, Rebecca?"

"Oh, I'm not obliged to tell all my fancies. He's a charming man, though, and quite young. I was surprised at that."

"Do you call him *young*?"

"Well, young for an old man," I answered, from the point of view of my seventeen years. "About thirty-five — don't you think?"

"He does look that when you see him moving about," said Marion, fixing her eyes upon vacancy, as if recalling a pleasant vision; "but when you're as near him as I was, you'll notice that his hair is gray, and that he has deep lines under his moustache and in his forehead."

"Some men are like that at thirty."

“Well, he is more than thirty, and he would n’t have so much sympathy if he was n’t the father of a large family. Either way, it makes no difference to me.”

That was what she said, but it was plain that she thought of nothing so much as of Dr. Richardson.

Dr. Godwin came earlier than usual, on the second day of June, when the royal toilet was barely finished, and Marion looked newly animated when the sounds were heard which indicated his approach. But there was no quick, marching footstep this time, and she frankly allowed some portion of her keenness to subside. The residue was rather more than Dr. Godwin had been accustomed to seeing in those days, however. Her smile had reminded him too much, as he afterwards said, of a hymn he had known in his boyhood, in which had been sung the rapture of seeing angel faces smiling from afar, when it was some little touch of animality that he would have been glad to discover. A doctor is bound to disparage angel tendencies, as he would anæmic symptoms, and to draw his raptures from the sight of well-oxygenated blood, glowing through the firm substance of an earthling.

“Well, well!” said Dr. Godwin. “Let us see! Let us see! Had some breakfast this

morning, had n't you? Slept pretty well, eh? Feel any interest in the Paris fashions? Umph! Umph! Umph!"

That thrice-repeated grunt was made while he counted the feeble pulse. It had stubbornly refused to abate, and its irregularly marked beats had increased, and were going on and on, unsteadily but more rapidly, towards the mere flutter with which it finishes. Fancy, then, the satisfaction with which her physician (emeritus) counted, on the second day of June, a steadier pulse, with no increase. He hardly dared to speak for fear the spell would be broken. But Marion spoke. What had become of her new doctor? she wanted to know.

Well, he had gone to Washington.

To Washington? Did he come from Washington? Then he did n't drop from the sky? She had n't thought where he did come from — she only perceived he was there.

"*I* perceive," said Dr. Godwin, with a spurious frown, "that it's time for me to give up. The youngsters are the ones in authority. In comes a stripling to-day, and to-morrow my stubborn young lady is better. *I* can't do these wonders. I'm going off to Washington myself. I'm going to change places with this Dr. Richardson, and let him come up here and work his miracles, while I frisk round in Washington, and

look after sin-sick politicians and worn-out ornaments of society. What do you say to that?"

"Is that the way you do — 'exchange,' like clergymen?"

"I do as I've a mind to; don't care a rap what anybody else does. I've jogged up and down here for the last five-and-forty years, and it's about time to have a bender."

"But it's June. You don't want to go to Washington in June!"

"I want to go when I've a mind to — confound it! It's June everywhere. You can't escape it if you go to the North Pole. What is so rare as a day in June and a day in Washington stirred up together? It's a bumper I mean to wet my whistle with, anyhow."

His reckless, but gently modulated tone was accompanied by an exceedingly grave and thoughtful look.

"When — when do you mean to go?" asked Marion.

"How will next Monday night suit you? Will that be soon enough?"

"The sooner you go, the sooner you'll come back."

"Won't promise to come back at all. May fall into bad ways, — take to drinking. Some men do, when their rivals step in."

"Then it will be so interesting to look you up and reform you."

“ Ah, there’s temptation in that! I should like to be looked up and reformed! I must go, or I shall be encouraged to sink into an inebriate at once,” the doctor declared, rising and turning about. “ Well, Rebecca! It can’t be that we’ve outtalked Rebecca, — outchattered the great Massachusetts chatterbox! ”

For I had n’t spoken a word. It had been as sweet to listen to this genuine pleasantry as it would have been to hear the Pastoral Symphony after a Dead March.

As usual after a sudden bound, there was a rebound, and in a day or two, though Marion had promised to live, and meant to keep her promise if possible, she began to say that, although life was indeed a glorious gift, what was there in it for her? — what that was truly her own? — and to feel it too much an effort to respond to its claims. If she had been left to grope her way back alone, I’m afraid she would have missed it, — lost it altogether. But like a sent salvator, the new doctor came up from Washington again, and brought strange medicines, not in the *materia medica*. He needed a few weeks by the sea, and Marion needed his rare wisdom and skill, his gentle compulsion, and the wonderful nameless power which he possessed of building up the intention of a patient, of infusing courage and volitional energy, which must needs help the physical in such cases.



There was nothing savoring of mind-cures and Christian science in his methods. They were what Esculapius himself would have employed, if he had been in the place of Dr. Richardson. Instead of Dr. Godwin, he came every day, and the charming conversation was repeated, and only relinquished in exchange for the almost equal pleasure of thinking it would be resumed on the morrow. And it was directly evident that the keenness of the pleasure was not all on Marion's part.

Some acquaintances — some friendships — draw from a week the ordinary results of a year, of a life-time, and in the course of two weeks that of Marion and her doctor seemed to have quite a traditionary past. To Marion, at least, life seemed to have doubled. Their conversations were chiefly of a grave and personal nature, it appeared, from the reports I had of them, and I used to wonder if Marion realized how they fixed upon herself and her past. She must have told the whole history of her life, in minutest detail.

“And what does he tell you of himself?” I asked, one day.

“Well, he tells me many of his thoughts, and some facts of his life,” she answered, “but he does n't enjoy chatting about himself, as I do. And he tells me of places he has seen — and

people. He has traveled. And I should think there was nothing he had not read. He talks of so many things I have never heard of, which makes me feel that I have n't read at all, or not exactly the right things. I have liked stories of lives, chiefly, you know. He said I must read John Morley's studies of lives (but I had never heard of John Morley), and then I should have not only the satisfaction of the story, but of some delightful thoughts that have grown out of it as well. He says it is n't so much that we want to know what people do, as that we like to see what kind of an essence was concealed under their deeds and words and in their lives, and what a man like John Morley will have to say about it, after he has well considered, in his clever mind. Ah, if I could have such a friend always, I need n't be a mere scrap of a being. I should be fed, and grow, and perhaps, some day, be worthy to sit down face to face with him, and give him thought for thought. But" — with a heavy sigh — "but presently he will return to Washington, and I shall grope about in the wrong places again, and find only the husks of things."

"Perhaps not," I said. "You could do like the prodigal — leave the husks, and find your own way to better things."

She turned her face to me quickly, smiling,

“ *That* is one of the stories I love, Rebecca,” she said. “If I should read it a thousand times, I should always weep with joy where it says his father saw him when he was a great way off, and ” —

Tears welled up at the very thought.

That remembrance of Washington yawning to swallow up her new friend again became more and more afflictive to Marion. I wondered she did not seem to wish for, or to miss, Dr. Godwin, who was a dear friend too, and of older standing. I am not sure that she did not dread his return, as the fatal signal.

Dr. Godwin had taken his leave of us with the understanding that he was to be in Washington for some weeks; but only a few days afterwards I was making my way down Union Street to the bakery, after buns, enjoying my progress through the long, elm-shaded vista, and the glimpse of sparkling water at the foot of the hill; admiring, too, the domestic and ecclesiastic architecture of the period, as conceived by New England genius, and feeling as much satisfaction and sensation in gazing upon a little granite pile of the Norman Gothic order, with its profusion of merlons, and judicious reserve of buttresses; its tower of strength (that would perhaps have fitted a Scandinavian fortress), in which hung a baptized bell, brought over the

sea from Spain, as some satiated persons would absorb before the Milan cathedral, when I directly received another sensation, for I saw, a little down the street, the gleam of the newly-painted box of the old buggy of the good doctor, and inside the buggy the good doctor himself, rattling along after the usual fashion of his five-and-forty years' performance.

"That must be his astral body!" I said to myself, for the people of the little Quaker city are very fond of osophies, and were talking about a new one just then. It was one of the things a certain few of them had a good mind to believe in.

I stopped short, and stood staring with a desire to get a good look at a friend in the astral light. On his own part, the doctor appeared to regard me as an unwelcome spectacle, but he drove up beside the curbstone and stopped.

"Now, why do you stand looking at me in that saucy fashion, Rebecca?" he asked. "And what are you gadding about the streets for, at this hour of the day?"

"I'm seeing the sights!" said I. "Do tell me! Are you truly in Washington, or are you here?"

"Well, the fact is I have n't got started yet, Rebecca," he said, leaning towards me and speaking in a confidential tone. "Circumstances over

which I had no control have been too much for me. But I shall get the upper hand of them directly. I shall be off, at length. Don't mention my difficulties to anybody, Rebecca! Don't say that you've seen me ignominiously plodding about here, when I'm thought of as a Washington swell! It's bad enough to know your own poor case yourself, without having everybody else know it, too. Don't speak of it, Rebecca! Hey?"

He had a wicked, deceitful look, but I was very fond of him, and so I promised, upon condition that he would tell me how it was, and why it was that he seemed so much like an impostor, and he answered, with his hat lifted, as the buggy rolled on, that association with a man from Washington was corrupting.

Cousin Morris also fell off from his accustomed attendance upon Miss Kenneth. Instead of frequently, he went almost rarely to see her, and upon these occasions watched the marvelous change as a curious phenomenon inducing a relativity of effect which placed him in the attitude of an interested but somewhat removed spectator. His manner towards Marion had heretofore strangely suggested the fatherly and friendly position quite as much as the loverly, and I used to think it had even a touch of the motherly, but it yielded, at length, in all other



directions, and resolved itself into the friendly-professional. This Dr. Richardson was evidently welcomed to a place among the essentials of Miss Kenneth's life, which he had vainly wished to fill, yet Morris seemed not discontented. Could it be that he was willingly, as well as of necessity, turning from the door at which he had waited, and sometimes knocked? He watched the obvious attraction between the new doctor and the girl he had longed to rescue, not like a thwarted or jealous lover. Sometimes he even appeared to be considering other matters, — deeply, industriously, — and his considerations were evidently not only of consequence, but they were pleasing, and at times, engrossing.

I was able to observe this, in various ways, and under various circumstances, for he had always kindly and thoughtfully taken me with him on frequent pleasant drives, to relieve the strain of aunt Maria's too exciting companionship, but this summer the drives were longer and more frequent, that I might be kept out in the fresher air of the country, which he said I needed, and which aunt Maria said I did n't. What I did need, she maintained, was a good dose of something quieting to the nerves. Though Morris was rather silent at these times, my impression is that he was never so agreeable, never so attentive to my own abundant chatter. The

simple scenery (often under evening light) in which these incidents were set is photographed upon my memory in clear soft pictures, which I turn over and over now, with pages of thought between ; — the pretty drive to Padan-Aram, with a view of the bay opening suddenly at the end, and even the dusty, motonous Long-plain road, with its uninteresting habitations ; and over the river, — down by the fort and the great white-washed beacon, where we sometimes alighted to sit on the rocks and watch the waves come in or the sails go out, and take up little discussions, while

“ Vague delight, like fitful blasts of balm  
To one who travels quickly, made the air  
Of life delicious ”

to me.

Often there was a patient to visit, and as I sat waiting and brushing the flies off the horse with the whip, I tried to brush away certain persistent impressions too, which seemed to me indicative of a self-deceptive genius.

“ How beautifully he takes his disappointment,” I said. “ What other man could find himself vanquished with such a reconciled appearance ? A person who did not know might say he was happy ; yet — I can’t believe it ! I can’t quite believe it ! ”

Let Dr. Richardson be whatever he might be

—lover or friend— he sufficiently illustrated the fact that for Morris Beverley to make himself in any way essential to Marion Kenneth was no longer achievable.

The pleasure of loving hopelessly is perhaps evanescent, but that of yielding gracefully is perennial, and, as I have said, I had frequent opportunities for observing that Morris yielded with grace, for the new friendship rapidly arrived at the stage which admitted a good many unprofessional visits, besides the daily morning attendance from Dr. Richardson, and we often met him when we made our own visits.

Morris would sit, upon occasion of these encounters, beholding the drama and pulling his moustache thoughtfully, with the look of an unselfish man, able to feel that it is no matter who brings good things to pass, so that they can, somehow, be brought to pass. No sigh, no frown of pain was noted by the one who looked upon the very lifting of his eyelid with interest.

“No, he is not intense; that is again manifest,” this observer would say to herself, but she loved even his failings more than the most excellent fulfillment of any other.

It was Merab who suffered the real tumult of feeling. She, after all, was the jeopardized lover. Dear heart! She rejoiced always in the sight of her darling growing stronger, but re-

joiced as one sitting on a barrel of gunpowder, with sparks flying all about her, though that is but a poor illustration of the silent dread which haunted that ever-before placid soul, lest the strange man should prove to be a wolf hovering about to carry off her one little ewe lamb. That he loved Marion was more and more apparent; and as to Marion herself, if the declaration of her love had been written in letters of light and hung up on the wall, it would not have added one iota to evidence. And if Dr. Phebe Carnes could have seen Miss Kenneth in those days, she would probably have owned herself mistaken, and been forced to place a heavy discount upon her rare acuteness, for a new systole and diastole of affection gave a stronger pulse to the recovered life than that which had throbbed so steadily in the filial vein. Marion was absorbed to the last spiritual fibre, to the last intellectual atom, to the last heart's drop, by affection for this stranger.

But it was an affection so touched with awe and reverence of its object, that it did not seem to my girlish fancy to be, after all, of the sort to make a happy romance. I could never have been in love with Morris, it seemed to me, if he had always appeared to me in such a panoply of courtly dignity, or if he had left such a godlike impression upon me as he went. I had no Pantheon for my ideal lover.

I could see that if Dr. Richardson dropped into a little natural tenderness towards his sweet, helpless patient, he directly drew himself up and talked about some exalted matter, — some extraordinary book, perhaps, for he always seemed to have one in his pocket, as one would keep his best friend by his side through the day, for the sake of the casual thoughts they might exchange. But the more he set himself up and looked far removed, the more Marion adored him, and it was such a childlike, contented attitude in which she worshiped, that in looking from one to the other, I declared sometimes to myself, that in all my seeing and hearing, in all my reading of poetry and prose, I never yet had seen, or heard of, or read of a pair of lovers like those. Yet the most purblind of the race of men (let me repeat it) could have discovered a great affection drawing these two souls together.

There are, of course, many ways in which love defines itself, — many kinds of love, — for love does not exclude the other qualities and emotions. This I considered, and so gave up, at length, expecting or hoping to see Marion in love after my fashion, or Dr. Richardson — But there I cut my comparison.

Yet I could not but like him — admire him — myself, that stiff, stern man, from whose grave eyes great floods of gentleness would inconti-



nently pour upon the frail child to whom they were joy and strength and life.

And at times I pitied him, for he seemed to lose his bearings altogether, and to be at a loss. It had, perchance, too great a burden, however sweet the burden, — that heart stoic and tender — and I began to suspect that here was another hopeless love ; that law, that “ duty, beloved of love — beloved but hated ” — had set a bound to this one. And again I would say, — for my imagination was lively, and could perform surprising feats, — “ He knows something ! — something about that dreadful father ! He loves her — ah, how he loves her ! — but there is some obstacle of family history which his pride cannot surmount.” That point I considered settled. Never was a question more completely decided.

It was when Marion made some plaintive allusion to her past — to her uncertain future, — when something like the old wistful look returned and fell upon him, that he seemed thus at a loss, — eager to speak, but all the more silent.

I was so often about, like an inevitable shadow, that I do not believe he was conscious of my presence, and I am sure that twice, at least, he opened his lips to pour his whole heart out, and then drew the restraining curb upon his desire.

I began to wish that he had never come. It might have been better for Marion to go on her voyage of discovery, I thought, than to come back to this dubious state of things.

It was not, of course, absolutely the single alternative to complete disaster that a man should speak out in two or even three weeks from the day his affection was conceived, but a few weeks seemed long to one who watched the hours and their results, who believed she understood what it would be to Marion to have the promise of this joy-giving, strength-giving, life-giving presence always about her ; a promise which I began to feel sure was never to be given.

When the fourth week came to an end, the whole aspect of things was so exasperating to me that if I had been a man I should have called Dr. Richardson out and asked him to explain himself, or choose his weapons.

It was at the beginning of the fifth week that I went over one morning, and found Dr. Richardson there. Marion was sitting up, in a pretty white wrapper, looking really fresh, and presenting the clearest indications that she was getting to be well-grounded upon life again. The doctor was reading aloud to her, — a custom he had recently adopted.

My comings and goings were but little interruption to the regular rotation of events in that

house, they were so much a part of the rotation. The doctor merely explained that it was an essay upon the workings of instinct that they were reading, gave a little *résumé* of the foregone pages, and then went on and on, until he finished with one of Vauvenargue's aphorisms, — "Reason misleads us more often than nature," — at which he paused, apparently reconsidering the thought, as if it especially impressed him.

"There, however, seems to be reason in nature," said Marion.

Dr. Richardson would have made some answer, probably, but a footstep which had been mounting the stairs brought in Morris Beverley, who looked a sufficient illustration of reasonable triumphant nature himself.

He seemed delighted by the sight of Marion's increasing strength, and he did not look displeased when his eyes rested for two comprehensive seconds upon a girl sitting over by the east window. He gave some little smoothing touches to his short, wavy hair, to be sure it was all compactly settled, which made the girl by the window smile, and then he gave another quick glance to see what she was smiling at.

Well, an unexplained smile is an invidious thing. She was smiling to consider how every little vanity and weakness is a charm in a man who is almost too serious and earnest. His seri-

ousness would seem absurd if it were not offset by some lighter fatuities. Morris's absurdities were delightful — really of consequence in the sum of his individualities. One might make a treatise on them.

(Do you see which "one"?)

Then he showed one of his more sensible traits, and chose a fittingly strong chair, in which he seated himself, and having cast another apprehensive glance at the girl who laughed, he presently got ready to say, —

"You ought to receive congratulations upon such a blooming patient as that."

Dr. Richardson fixed a long, inscrutable gaze upon Marion, the meditative lines of his mouth growing sweet as he looked, and softening the strength of a face that must some time have been too rigorous, and answered that he should make a great point of giving himself joy when Marion was entirely strong again.

"Don't you think she might begin to walk by herself?" he added.

"I think she ought," Morris answered.

"Oh no, I could n't," Marion protested. "I can scarcely stand alone, you know."

"Have you tried?"

"N-o."

The truth was that she had depended upon her new doctor for each step of her progress.

It had been altogether his will or his wish which had borne her along, and what he required was still the measure of what she could do.

“You will try, will you not? Try to stand!” Dr. Richardson begged, going over to her side.

His entreaty had the force of a command, and Marion, whose ambition rose in response to each new call upon it, hesitated no more, but pressed her hands to the arms of her chair, and slowly came to her feet without difficulty.

“Pray come to me!” Dr. Richardson further besought her, placing himself ten steps beyond and inviting her with outstretched hands.

A soft color crept into the girl’s cheeks, and she made a brave step towards him; another, and another; pausing, wavering a little, bracing herself, reaching after the extended hands, fixing her eyes upon the goal, she made the little journey triumphantly, and as the two pairs of hands met, any one might have seen the undisguised, though unuttered, and perhaps unutterable tenderness that spoke and answered from face to face. It seemed cruel that this performance should take place in the presence of the unsuccessful though resigned and patient lover. I felt sorry for Morris, and for the first time saw that he did look troubled.

“Shall I go back alone?” Marion asked, her ambition and apparently her strength unexhausted.



“If you think you can. Try to, please.”

She turned, clinging a moment longer to her support, and made a second effort, with the courage of her success. But before she could arrive upon the other shore again, her knees sank, and she fell forward, her hands clutching at a way-side couch. It was so sudden a declension that the hands ready to save her were scarcely in time, yet there was no harm done; nobody was hurt, — unless Dr. Richardson himself. His low cry of pain was more startling than the occurrence which it bemoaned.

“My child! my child!” The words came in a murmurous outburst, and he gathered the slight form in his arms, as if it had indeed been a little child, breathing half-suppressed sounds of lamentation, yearning, love, and placing it upon the couch, poured out prayers for pardon.

While Marion fixed a steady regard upon the revelation of which his frank face was the open page, a strange look of wonder, enlightenment, rapture unfolded in her own. “Who are you? What are you?” she said. “It is time to know, when — when” — She paused, with her trembling lips parted.

“That is what I want *you* to say, my darling child,” returned the man in whom she lived and moved and had her being, his voice shaking, and his face shining, as he bent over her. “Tell me

— tell me ! Who am I ? What am I ? Say the word ! Let me hear it come from your lips as if we had never been parted ! ”

“ Father ! my father ! *My father !* ” I heard Marion cry, as I was hurried away, for Morris had taken my hand and led me across the hall to Merab’s little morning sitting-room.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### BY THE WAY.

THE best moments of some lives — or what might be the best — are under especial contribution to folly and inconsistency. *Experto crede.*

As I stood in Merab's cool, gray room, collecting those sudden confounding impressions, trying to separate them from the preconceived view, at the same time that I was overwhelmed by the great wave of emotion which had swept by us, I scarcely perceived that Morris kept my hand in his, sympathetically, until the clasp tightening seemed to ask for recognition and response, while he drooped his head to fix upon me a scrutinizing regard. There is contagion in the contact with strong feeling like that we had seen. Our own souls were susceptible on account of it, and vaguely reached and tended towards some such completion of experience. Tears of mixed meaning were ready to fall from my eyes, but remembering, suddenly and painfully, what a tear had once seemed to have done,

I freed my hand with abrupt decision, and turned to move away. It would have seemed like offering a lure, — like offering the full price for what I had formerly been too poor to buy, — if I had turned to my cousin in tears, yet I felt, as a sensitive is supposed to feel the presence of invisible things, how tenderly such a turning would have been met. The great gust of feeling which swept into Merab's house — that region of hitherto perpetual calm — might have carried others with it. But it did not.

Under pressure of many sensations, my capacity of speech seemed reduced to two words: "Her father! Her *father*!" I said and re-said until, after a little, I was able to add, "but where is all his villainy and cruelty?"

"Mercifully, that was a mistake," said Morris. "See how often I am wrong!"

He spoke sorrowfully, standing where I had left him, and glancing back, without fully turning, in the fashion which is called seeing with the eyes in the back of the head, I discovered that he had turned to the table, and was nervously running over the leaves of Merab's old "Life of Madame Guyon." He looked altogether forsaken, and I felt an irrational pity, and with some comforting intention said, "Mistakes which end by being of no consequence to anybody need not be much deplored."

“Don’t say that! don’t!” he murmured.

The words were nothing, — I extracted no meaning from them, — but the tone was one of pleading penitence.

I was still wary of delusions, but I thought I had a flash of illuminating truth. Marion no longer needed a rescue; the social order had righted itself; and that ground having fallen from under his dear, blundering feet, he was groping after some path he had unconsciously left, to wander in magnanimous byways. I was wicked. I was willing to let him grope longer. Yet I had no blame for him, for magnanimity owes no account of itself. While I hugged my hope, — which after all might be a delusion, — I only said: —

“Never mind mistakes; only tell me, why have you kept this such a secret?”

“A few weeks ago the excitement would have killed her.”

“You might have told the rest of us. It would n’t have killed Merab and me.”

“It was her father’s request that no one should know but her physicians. Besides his fear of excitement, he wanted to establish a past, full of confidence, — wanted to be sure of her affection before he presented his claim.”

“He might have been absolutely sure of that a month ago. Where did he start up from?”



Where has he been keeping himself? How did you manage to get him here so opportunely? I want to know everything at once;” and as he did not answer promptly, I added, to fill up the pause, “I shall never be able to think of Marion as Miss Richardson, — a girl with a father, like other people.”

“It is the father who will have to be rechristened,” Morris then responded. “He was Richard’s son, he said, and he felt honest in calling himself so. As to his degree of doctor, that was assumed for the occasion too, you know.”

“What is he then?”

“He is Brigadier-General John Kenneth, — a hero of battles, instead of bottles.”

“Has he been so occupied in battling that he could n’t keep the run of his family?”

“Ah, that is a sad story!”

“I want to hear it.”

“Miss Kenneth will tell you, probably.”

“I’d rather you would.”

He threw down the “Life of Madame Guyon,” which had been, meantime, thoroughly examined, and came towards me with a new look — an amazing look — which made me say to myself, “Goodness! I do believe he *is* intense, after all!” but I said to him, “I thought I would n’t need to wait so long if you could tell me, but now I think it is time we should find poor Merab,

and tell her something. She is being left out too long."

I wonder to this day why I hurried away and left my cousin alone with Madame Guyon. Ah, if psychologic research could throw a ray of light upon the self-destructive impulse of some apparently cheerful and sane minds, it might lead to useful results!

When Merab was told, her calm uniformity hardly varied. I found her stripping currants off their stems, and currant jelly was ostensibly the matter to which her thoughts were given, but really, no doubt, they had all been involved in the very subject I brought to her.

The faded pink cheeks turned paler, and the neat little hand was less steady, but she made no exclamation, and sat with her eyes dropped, taking in the truth as quietly as she might have absorbed the familiar truisms of the Meeting, crossing her hands upon the edge of the pan in her lap, to conceal their trembling, as she listened. When I had finished, she said simply, "He ought to have told me the truth."

No explanation seemed fully to justify this failure. A remove of one word's breadth from absolute truth; however that word might be dressed up to look like the truth, was a grave transgression in her eyes, and she accepted General Kenneth, as Marion's father, with a re-

served dignity. The optimistic view of her changed prospects which she afterwards adopted — that he would be one more to do for, she hoped — was largely tinctured, I am sure, with the added hope that he might be brought under moral influences. A man who had been exposed to much deleterious contact with unchristianized Indians and the general wickedness of the world — as the history of his life subsequently revealed — became an object not only of compassion, but of possible reformation, and when it had been arranged that she should not be parted from Marion, or when she had been brought to see that Marion so needed her, would so need her, in the new conditions into which she would be going, — a young girl with no feminine protection, — that it would be her duty to go with her, she resigned herself to the prospect of leaving the old home, to which she had grown like a limpet to the rock, and resumed her self-forgetful cheeriness again. Nothing could better illustrate her affection for Marion, and the power of compensation there was in the thought that so much renunciation came of being so much needed.

Dr. Godwin came out of Coventry the next morning in such a disorderly condition of mind that I felt convinced he had really been to Washington. He came in quietly enough, as if

he meant to behave well, professed to have paid his vows to Domiduca the evening before, and offered himself as a receptacle for the local news of the day; pretended to be overcome with amazement and chagrin upon the discovery that he had been so taken in by the *pseudo* Dr. Richardson, but presently confessed, when there was no escape, that he had been coaxed and bribed into being his accomplice. "I went so far as to promise not to tell," he said, "and after that start, one goes downhill by the force of gravity, you know. But I still kept some tendency to tell the truth. Upon my soul, I was afraid I *should* tell it! It's an infirmity of mine. 'I won't be responsible for myself,' said I. 'I shall let the cat out of the bag, unless I go to Washington!'"

He threw me a little *œiliad*, which an over-fastidious person would have criticised.

"But *did* you go to Washington?" I asked.

"I stayed in a capital city, — where all the men are virtuous, and all the women brave, — same thing," he answered boldly.

Marion, sunk in the depths of her great chair, and in a *deliquium* of affectionate gladness, too, watched him with her new smile, from which all the phantoms had vanished.

As to aunt Maria, when two and three weeks had gone, and she had still heard nothing from

the enemy, she began to look out of the south windows with surprise, and in course of time there arrived a day when her eyes received the dumfounding impression that it was actually drawn up into position just opposite, on Merab's lawn. It was a dark moment for my aunt. She felt tempted to doubt the promises. (She had not been told of Miss Kenneth's improvement, for she was supposed to be indifferent — not to say indignant — when such matters were mentioned.) But when she began, further, to notice a triumphant-looking young man going and coming at the next door, she recovered hope again. If the enemy could only be taken and carried away into captivity, her song of thanksgiving might again arise.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### POOR LITTLE MISS LAURE!

WHEN it was found that Marion had a father, — an entirely respectable man, — and when it appeared that his non-presentment of himself had been occasioned by the necessity of discharging duties in the service of his country, on the remote frontiers, the inhabitants of the little Quaker city, who had already had the privilege of knowing something of Miss Kenneth, were able to perceive the privilege more clearly, and having perceived it, were ready to avail themselves of it, for they hoped to perfect their knowledge and understanding still further, by means of visits, the postponement of which they neither excused nor explained, for if they are difficult, these honest people, one of their difficulties is to dissemble, and they left it frankly to be understood that Miss Kenneth, having been somewhat elucidated, was found to have a corresponding title to recognition. As there were always some things left unexplained, however, there was always a proportionate reserve on the part of these

good souls, who in sending down buckets into their wells after truth, are surely justified in discarding what they bring up, if it be not truth itself, whole and sound.

It was not considered needful to publish General Kenneth's sad history, and it was especially guarded from Mrs. Lovell. I should be bound to consider its sacredness, too, and I do, even while I record as much of it as Marion told us.

"I know it all now," she said to Merab and myself, as we sat together in Merab's little morning sitting-room, after General Kenneth had gone down to Washington again, — Merab looking over the exquisitely sweet linen just come up from the ironing, and taking a stitch here and there, while Marion and I sat in luxurious idleness. "Next to my own it is your right to know, — and I must have your sympathy in everything that comes to me — always."

There was a soft murmur from Merab, and a slight, mute demonstration on the part of the other auditor, and Marion went on: —

"All my mother's sorrow — all my father's — was on my account, for it was when I was born — because of that — that my mother suffered mentally."

Something like the old look and a moment of silence fell upon her; and then she made another effort, — for it was an effort, visibly.

“I shall begin as my father did, and tell you that when our civil war opened he was scarcely twenty,—just graduated from West Point,—and went into its duties with all the enthusiasm of his youth. It was at the time of the surrender of New Orleans that he was dispatched to that city upon special duty. Think of that poor old city, as my father described it to me! It had long been under martial law, without its commerce, drained of its money and even of its provisions, its people cowed and miserable. Can you not fancy there would be many helpless ones, for whom even the enemy would feel compassion? My father was quartered in a sweet old house, that he describes to me as if he loved it,—an old white house, with Corinthian pillars, set among magnolias, with a tangled, wasted, mournful old garden that was a pathetic poem. It was supposed at first to be deserted, but when my father attempted to open the door of one of its out-of-the-way rooms, it was found to be locked, and an old negro, watching near it like a faithful dog, prayed him to spare that one little corner. He was persuaded to explain his interest in that especial apartment, which he did, weeping as only a poor old negro can weep, my father said. — I shall say ‘*my father*’ often, you will see. It has a charming sound. — ‘Poor little Miss Laure’ was in the locked room. That was why it was sacred.”

She brushed away tears with almost every phrase, as she went on.

“Poor little Miss Laure! Her father and mother had died with yellow fever a few years before, and she had lived here with her grandmother since; those two, — with their servants, — a quiet, lonely pair. During the bombardment of the forts, the feeble old lady had been prostrated, and at the news of the surrender, *she* surrendered, — life and all. The negroes had gone, all but that one decrepit and his wife, and the frightened, half-starved, helpless little Laure was locked up with this old woman and her terrors. My father came to her as a defender. Through him she had the feeling of safety and peace and plenty again. I imagine all that he did not say to me. Can you not imagine the poor, lonely thing, of scarcely sixteen years? My father and some other young officers occupied a remote part of the house, which left her unmolested, and sent messages of thanks to her, as their hostess, which she received scornfully as the irony of the victorious enemy, and took her renewed comforts as no more than her right. The hands that restored them were the same that had robbed her of them, was her thought, probably. But one day she accidentally met my father in the mournful old garden, and he talked with her! You can imagine? You said

yourself, Rebecca, that he was very charming, and she! I can seem to feel how the sight of her must have touched him. I can't conceive his not having loved her, can you? I can't conceive it to have been different at all. The most loyal officer in the army would have loved such a rebel, and the bitterest little rebel would have submitted to be reconquered by *my father!*

"He was often there in the vicinity of New Orleans during nearly two years, and would always see the little rebel. General Banks had presently adjusted things for the public comfort, and my father for that of the poor child. But directly he was ordered to move to Alexandria, with the main army, to engage in what he called the Red River Cotton Expedition, and then he did not see her for nearly a year, — not until he had been wounded, and had a long furlough in consequence, and then he went down and brought my mother up to Washington as his wife. She came a happy bride, although it meant eternal separation from her friends in Louisiana. So you see, after that, she had only my father in all the world.

"It was after the war was done that I was born. My father was on duty somewhere on the Mississippi River, and my mother was staying at St. Louis, meantime. Can you think of anything so bitter, so cruel, as that her sick mind



should conceive an aversion to her husband, to whom she was literally an idol? She seemed to have an overwhelming dread of him. Ah, my poor little mother! I took her all, and left her beggared. She gave her treasure of affection to me, — all to me, — and went suffering for it during the remainder of her short days! Her physician believed that her sad condition would be transient. He advised my father not to force his presence upon her, but to get an appointment which would take him away for a while, until she had had a chance to recover. He was sent out to see to some Indian affairs, and left my mother and me with an aunt of his, whom my mother seemed to love. I hurry in telling you, because it is so grievous, so painful. I must not speak of it too long.”

“No, don’t thee think of it any more, dear!” said Merab, whose own distress was great.

“Yes, ah yes, I must finish now,” Marion persisted. “I shall never have courage to begin again.” And with choking pauses, and renewed intervals of weeping, she went on.

“He had scarcely reached Arizona, when the news came to him that his wife and child had died. Yes, and when the particulars were known, they were that my mother had drowned herself and me. Something belonging to my mother was brought forward by a woman on

one of the river piers, who testified that he had seen its owner throw herself into the river. He might have been led to suppose so, — she may have wandered there with some such thought. The supposition that she had drowned, at any rate, covered her flight, which happened in the night, when her nurse was sleeping soundly. Then began our wanderings; and the dread — the fear — which I could not understand — Oh, think of it! — was of *my father*! Sometimes, I suppose, it was of people whom mamma imagined were watching and following, to take her back to him. Ah, if I had known! It is no wonder that my father wished to part with his own life. But he took it up again, on that dreary footing, and has passed much of the time since out in the Territories and on the frontiers.

“I must tell you that my father had sold my mother’s property in Louisiana for her, and placed the proceeds in a bank in New York, as she wished, until she should decide how she would use it or invest it, for she had various schemes, one of which was to buy a place she greatly liked on the Hudson. It was to lie waiting until after I was born, and then she should see. If I had been a boy, she was to have bought that estate, so that I might grow up to be its proprietor. She thought much of a man having an inherited estate.

“When his sorrow came, my father never thought of the money more, until he was recalled to Washington last autumn, and there he heard that some of my mother’s relatives had been unfortunate and poor ever since the war, and it occurred to him that there was money in a bank in New York which he should never care to use, and which they might as well have. He went up to make some arrangements about it, and upon calling for its account was told that it had been withdrawn! The date of its withdrawal was some weeks later than that of my mother’s supposed death, and as no one but my mother herself could possibly have received it, imagine the counter-shock it was to my father, to discover that we had not died, — or not as it had been believed. Ah, my poor father! What months those must have been, in which he was thinking — all that there was to think! — and in a quiet way — not to raise a hue and cry — working to find out, if possible, where we were, or if we really were at all.

“At length, in the last of May, he met an old comrade, who had been with him in New Orleans, and had seen my mother in those days, and remembered her as if they had been only the days just past. He had, however, never seen my father since, — never heard of his sorrow, — and he said to him: ‘It could n’t have been

your wife that I saw on Vineyard Sound last summer, though I should have said it was if I had n't remembered that twenty years would make some changes. It must have been her daughter, though.'

"He had seen me with Dr. Godwin, on the day of the regatta, and remembered it. And that is the way my father found me, — by coming straight to Dr. Godwin." She finished with a weary, hysterical sob.

"There!" said Merab, patting, embracing, and hushing her darling, "now thee keep quiet! Say no more, dear child. Hark! There's the postman!"

I ran down to bring up the daily letter from Washington. Marion had plenty of letters and messages, at length.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRESIDE.

I WAS glad that something truly romantic had come within my own experience and knowledge of life, for I had not been brought fully and intelligently to understand what a wretched condition of things is the romantic. It seemed to me, then, that the best of life was in the little romance vouchsafed to it, but I wanted the romance real and substantial.

Nothing could have been more real than the sight of Marion expanding day by day into an almost audacious vigor and bloom; the old wistful look exchanged for one of superb sufficiency, while that expensive counterfeit of fine spirits which she had maintained for her mother's sake formed a pale background, against which the true radiance glowed like sunrise splendor upon the wanness of a moon-lighted morning.

And upon the background of General Kenneth's sober self-restraint there shone, from time to time, the spectacle of a man who appeared in Merab's doorway in about fifteen minutes after



the arrival of the steamboat train, on a little visit of hours from Washington, his hands and his pockets full of parcels, and his carriage packed with boxes. A brown-faced, heavily-moustached man, of military aspect, with a grave interest in six-button gloves and a girl's hats and fichus, was a view so peculiar in my small experience that it was only second in interest to that of an inside view of the boxes. All those things Marion must have, but she must not expend her precious strength in finding them. It was not for her to go seeking them at the hands of New York. It was for New York to be laid at her feet.

And by and by all these resources of New York were gathered together in large trunks, and disappeared with Marion, who went, under Merab's matronage, to pass the winter with her father in Washington, where he had been appointed Chief of Ordnance.

They were more like *bons camarades* and faithful friends than father and daughter. That-relationship seemed almost absurd, as one saw them together, and General Kenneth could not, in reason, have suddenly brought to Washington a beautiful and hitherto unheard-of daughter, unless he had brought Merab too. Dear Merab was a universally recognized stamp, which made the truth patent. She might have committed

any crime with impunity, — nobody would have believed it of her.

It was with an air of satisfaction that aunt Maria looked upon Merab's shut-up house, after they had all gone, and she was sometimes heard to declare that her faith had been tried, but that she had found the promises to be unfailing. To me, Hannah Shaw's one light from the kitchen window, of an evening, was a mournful sight, but the mournful things of some people are always the welcome things of others, and a look of satisfaction on the face of aunt Maria was so rare a sight as to be almost compensatory for anything, even the visits of Friend Reuben Rogers, who came over to discourage us with his usual assiduity, whenever he could think of anything to the purpose, or whenever it was "borne in upon his mind" to say something we particularly did not wish to hear.

Morris, in those days, seemed to be newly aroused. He made himself as agreeable to aunt Maria and me as if he had really stored up a reserved fund of charming qualities with which to astonish us. I began to feel as I had done a year before, and to say to Evangeline again, "What am I so glad about? Has anything delightful happened?"

But no, nothing especial happened, until the last of November, and what happened then was not at all delightful.

One of my chief comforts, during the time in which I had sojourned with aunt Maria, had been the letters that came regularly from Dick and Cam and Columbia, and the occasional ones from the kind lady who had little Milly in Worcester, and from Mr. and Mrs. Preston. But one day I failed to get the before unfailing sheets over which Columbia regularly broke the fourth commandment for my sake. The sweat of her brow, by which she earned her daily bread, could have been nothing to speak of in comparison with the wearisome toil which produced for me, every Sunday, four honestly measured pages of mixed observations from her pen, including some of a religious and redeeming nature. I wondered and was anxious for a day or two, when a note from Mrs. Preston explained that Columbia had suffered a serious disaster, having slipped upon a bit of wet soap and fallen, pulling a boiler of scalding suds upon herself.

I barely waited to finish the note before I made the first movement to go to my Columbia. This was to announce and explain my intention to aunt Maria.

It appeared, then, that I really was dear and indispensable to somebody; as dear as other helpful appliances; a little better than a maid, a little dearer than a nurse. And it appeared, too, that I had come to be a more absolute pos-

session than these kinds of servers. My aunt utterly declined to part with me, and was calmly sure that I would take care not to part with my only home.

“But, aunt Maria,” I said, “you don’t quite understand. I must go to Columbia, and must make haste. I’ll come back as soon as possible.”

Then it was that aunt Maria pronounced that solemn bull of excommunication which was to cut me off from that lot of my own which seemed about to make life worth living — richly worth living.

The clock ticked a few times, marking rather than breaking the silence, as aunt Maria looked coolly upon me, measuring my helplessness.

“Rebecca,” she said, “if you go, you need n’t come back.”

I was too much stunned to make a response. Automatically I turned away, sent my order for a carriage, and in packing my trunk put in a large supply of tears, — enough for the years to come. I almost realized how much, after all, I must resign. Evangeline’s mournful look seemed given to me, and I returned it with one equally tristful as I turned to take my last look through the old house, and say good-by, good-by to it all. Even the ugly duplicit parlor had come to seem like home, and Morris’s library! — Sitting there

in the old oak chair before his table, I asked if it *must* be, and yes, it *must*, I firmly answered. Our dear old Columbia, who had given the best of her life to us, who would have suffered vivisection for us, who had only me from whom to expect the succor she so sorely needed! I would as soon have planned to leave my sister and my brothers to the care of chance benefactors. So I wrote "good-by," to leave on the table where Morris would sit down in a few hours; but I do not feel obliged to say exactly all that I did, and all that I left with that good-by.

It was painful to say those words even to Absalom and Rip, to the women in the kitchen, and to Sally the cat. But after it was all done, there was the parting with aunt Maria.

This ordeal I was spared, however, for my aunt had put the seal of her locked door upon herself, and rejected my farewell.

So I departed without any godspeed, through the invisible green door. But as I entered my carriage, Friend Reuben Rogers was passing, with his eyes open for somebody whose courage needed to be dampened, and he stopped to look into the meaning of such independent movements on my part. My explanation, as it was given in rather a mournful tone, appeared to meet with his approval. "Farewell, Rebecca," he said, "and remember that in the world we must have tribulation."



“Yes,” I answered, “but in spite of that, I love the dear world with all my heart.” Upon which, I indulged a hope that Friend Reuben was discouraged himself.

The *pyrus japonica* stood bare and shivering in the November wind as I turned to take my last look, and the wistaria, shuddering as it clung closer to the walls and embraced the warm chimney, was only a skeleton of the beauty it had been when I came to live under the roof upon which it had wantoned.

Retracing my way, I retraced the history of the year; and reaching forward to the moment which should bring me to my poor old Columbia, I reached backward to the dear little Quaker city which held so much that I had learned to love. Everything unlovable was forgotten. I loved aunt Maria, as the distance widened between us.

Poor Columbia I found wound from top to toe in linseed oil and lime-water, and her first agonies relieved, so that she was able to celebrate my arrival with simple, honest, resounding *Te Deums*, of her own composing, which she so mixed up with thanksgiving and praise and homage to her dear Miss Rebecca that it would have been difficult to discriminate the two forms of devotion.

Mrs. Preston, who had been Columbia’s angel

of mercy, was with her when I arrived. She looked upon me with consternation, when she understood that my occupation was gone, — that I had come back to stay. Clearly, I was a disappointment to her.

“We have admired the way in which you seemed to be succeeding with poor Mrs. Stonebridge, Rebecca,” she said, “and we hoped you were going to be one of those exemplary young persons who improve and reform their unpleasant relatives.”

“Ah, no,” I responded sadly, “I have n’t produced so much as the dawn of a reformation in anybody; but, dear Mrs. Preston, I do assure you, the person you speak of would have held her own against Martin Luther himself. Henceforth, Columbia and I will live together. That seems to be foreordained.”

But Mrs. Preston declared it was not fitting that I should abide in the poor little hut.

“Very well,” said I, “I don’t intend to. I’m rich. I have one hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket, with which I propose to reconstruct the fireside. Can you think of a snug little waxy-looking house that could be rented for about twenty dollars a month?”

Mrs. Preston considered. Yes, there was a little cot of that sort. “But, Rebecca,” she added, “one hundred and fifty dollars won’t go very far in the reconstruction of a fireside.”

“Of course not,” I was willing to allow, “but I intend to have more presently. I planned it all out, as I was coming along on the train. I learned wonderful things at aunt Maria’s, in the presence and absence of cooks. I’m going to be not only a cheerer, but a baker, — and perhaps something of a confectioner. I shall make such cakes and jellies and pies and tarts and bon bons of many sorts that everybody will be dissatisfied with their own, and come swarming to me for mine. Columbia and I will have as much as we can do to attend to them.” (Columbia’s *Te Deums* were going on with the *pianissimo* stop on.) “One hundred and fifty dollars will last a while. It will buy me a bed and a chair, and a few other things, — Columbia has her own. Now where is the cot? We can take the patient over, — bed and all together; she need n’t even know it.”

There were some cheap little cottages, built to rent, on a new street, but they would be out of the way for business, Mrs. Preston said, with an uneasy, dubious manner. She evidently thought there was about to be another poor family on her hands.

“In that situation we should have the bay before us,” I said reflectively. “We must have a horizon,” I added with assurance, “if we have to hire a boy to deliver our goods. I shall go

and investigate." Mrs. Preston's doubts seemed to increase at the mental spectacle of a one-hundred-and-fifty-dollar *ménage*, furnished chiefly with a horizon, which so stimulated a desire to prove her doubts to be mistaken that I went away early the next morning, having passed the night dozing in a high-backed chair, braced into a reclining position by a broomstick under the rockers, much to Columbia's discontent. Some one was found to stay with her for a few hours, so that I need not return until all was arranged.

A glaringly fresh little box of a house was rented, which did seem a rash venture, but eighteen months in the cheering-up business had built up a great fabric of courage, self-reliance, and ingenuity. The house rented, it was next to be made dry and warm for occupancy. I did not dally, but at once bought wood and coal, and went to a stove-dealer to hire a large second-hand stove, and have it immediately set up in the centre of the house, from which position it would be the thermal influence of the whole surrounding system, and adapt its uninhabitable zones to human life.

When all was ready, I set my fire going, and stood watching it, with the thought that, after all, one thing was accomplished in life. One spot there would be to which I could hold, and be glad. As I had told aunt Maria, I now told

myself: "If there is so much as one only thing in life which is bright and pleasant, that I mean to hold on to; and if there is n't such a thing, I'll make it — I'll *be* it myself!"

And by and by I could have my Milly; and Dick and Cam would come home. I was able to sing at this thought, and the echo of my voice returned to me like an antiphon through the little void. The sunshine streamed across the floor, and there was a flock of sparrows flitting and twittering under the windows, as I went and stood looking out upon my horizon.

It was there somewhere, — all that I could have liked to be and to do and to have. And there, also, was the great Perhaps. Beyond that line what might not have been — what might not yet be possible? "If I could choose," I said, —

" 'I would not creep along the coast, but steer  
Out in mid-sea, by guidance of the stars.' "

"But as at present I cannot choose, I will creep, and will also be glad. From the coast I can touch that line with far-reaching hopes, and think it *may* be passed — some time."

And so I sang, and drowned the sound of coming feet on my wooden doorstep. The door itself opened without my knowledge, and then the step, quiet as it was, sounded through the vacant rooms. I turned, startled, and there was my cousin Morris.



He had stopped, silently, in the doorway of the room where he found me, with his hands crossed, and his hat in one of them, as he might have done if he had been looking at the house, with a view to renting it.

“You seem happy, Rebecca,” he said.

“Yes, — do I?” I replied.

“You are much like the monk Basle.”

“I’ve forgotten poor Basle. How is it I’m like him, please.”

“He was inveterately happy, and made other condemned souls happy, even in the hottest phlegethon, so that hell was turned into heaven wherever he went.”

“Oh, yes; and good souls came from afar to see him. I remember now.”

He put his hat on the floor, and came to me as gently as if I had been a patient, who must not be disturbed.

“How delightfully the new house is furnished,” he said, smiling upon me.

“With a stove!”

“And Rebecca.”

“And a guest.”

“When I came home last evening, and found Rebecca gone, *there* was the empty, unfurnished house,” he went on, tossing his head backward, to indicate the place he had come from. “Your ‘good-by’ has furnished a subject for thought ever since.”

He laid a hand softly upon each of my shoulders, and I could feel his steadfast eyes beseeching mine. "It is not home without you," he continued. "I should not miss the sun out of heaven more than I miss you, little joy-giver."

He paused, and his look still entreated me -- it compelled me -- to lift up my own eyes, and if there was anything still unguessed, I am sure it was all told then, -- all, and more than all, that words could have declared. And I, too, grasped a new and startling truth, -- that there is no intensity like that of the quiet fixed stars. The hands on my shoulders quickly removed. For a long, long moment I was wrapped about, -- deeply buried in exquisite tenderness. There was nothing else in all the world, except these softly-murmured words: --

"Dear -- dearest one, believe what I say; a man may have two loves -- You think not? He may have twenty loves. He can have but one life; and *you are my life!*"

That was years ago, but still I am here in the little cot. The fireside is solid and secure, for the baking business has prospered. It has a Boston-reaching reputation.

That it started at once upon a firm footing is due to the two silent partners who directly implored to be admitted. I was scarcely removed

to my humble little home, indeed, when Dr. Godwin made me a sudden visit, and insisted upon investing some loose capital. He looks carefully after the interests of his investment, and comes often to pass a few hours at the cottage. These are the merriest hours of the year to my darling Milly. Dick and Cam, who are very wise and stuffed full of Latin, — who really will be remarkable men, — call the beloved old doctor, in private, “the Emperor Titus,” because, they say, he is “*deliciæ humani generis*,” — “*humani generis*” meaning especially themselves.

The Emperor Titus can beat eggs, cream butter, and even roll out pie-crust with a facility which is only achieved by practice. He — as it has been said — is one of the silent partners, if a partner can be denominated silent who forever dilates and expatiates and orates and perorates.

Morris is the really silent partner. He too comes often, but his gentle face wears a deepening shadow, for aunt Maria has declared war against me. At present I am the enemy, over whom she reads selections from the Psalms.

Do you ever hear it said of a man, “He will not marry while his mother lives”?

Fancy what that may mean to some young life, whose horizon is daily narrowing and narrowing! One may not hope to bring comfort

to such, but may not one bring this excellent aphorism? —

“Quand on n’a pas ce qu’on aime, il faut  
aimer ce qu’on a.”





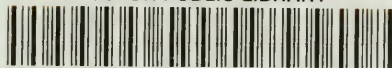
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